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ABSTRACT

The immediate stimulus for this collection of papers was a conference, Self-Access and the Adult Language Learner, organized by the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) and the Language Centre of the University of Cambridge in December 1992 at Queen's College, Cambridge. Several 1-day conferences on the same theme were also organized during 1993 and 1994 in Stirling (with Scottish CILT), the Universities of Westminster, Leicester, and Bristol. Papers include: "Aspects of Learner Discourse: Why Listening to the Learners Is So Important" (Philip Riley); "Demystifying IT in Second Language Learning" (Jeremy Fox); "Hypermedia and Cognitive Tools" (Terry Mayes); "Preparing Learners: Toolkit Requirements for Preparing/Orienting Learners" (Leslie Dickinson); "Learner Support: Interacting with Learners" (Edith Esch); "'Whatever Is Worth Knowing Can Never Be Taught' (Oscar Wilde)" (Peter Forbes, Anny King); "Self-Access, Not Self-Service: Tesco versus Taylor's" (Edith Esch); "From Continuing to Higher Education: Open-Access Learning at Anglia Polytechnic University" (Anne Ife); "A Unique Resource-Based Language Learning System" (Ritva-Liisa Cleary, Lucila Makin); "Learner Telesupport: Language Advising by E-Mail" (Lucila Makin); "Learners' Search Criteria and Cataloguing Language Learning Material: Demands Imposed on Databases" (Ritva-Liisa Cleary); "Files and Catalogues: Meeting and Answering Learner Queries in a Resource Centre" (Sam M. Cembalo); "Implementing a Support System for Language Learning in a Resource Centre on an Industrial Site" (Daniele Abe); "Self-Access Language Centres: Implications for Managers, Teachers and Learners" (Jack Lonergan); "The Language Learning Centre at the University of Central Lancashire: A Case Study" (Stella Hurd); "Preparing Teachers for Self-Access: Hong Kong Experiences" (Herbert Pierson); "A Study of Independent Learning: The Learner Training Programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong" (Beatrice Ma); "Keeping Contact with Learners" (Eva Fung-kuen Lai); "Using Computers for Authentic Communication" (Linda Mak); "Developing Materials for the Independent Learning Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong" (Emma Yuen-wai Poon); and "Comments from an Adult Language Learner" (N. W. Barlow). (MSE)

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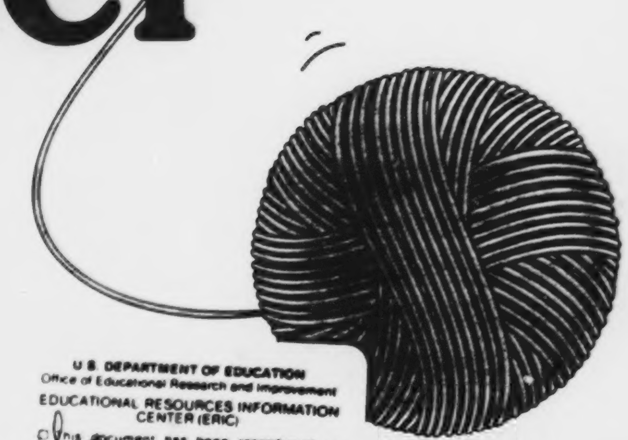
Self-Access and the Adult Language Learner

Edited by Edith Esch



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Self-access
and the adult language learner

edited by Edith Esch

CILT

The views expressed in this book are those of the editor and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of CILT.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the making of this book and, more particularly, Ute Hitchin from CILT, who managed to engineer most of the important editorial decisions with exemplary determination and tactful diplomacy.

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Foreword

Lid King

Periodically in the development of human thought, certain key words have become so widely used that they seem almost meaningless, exercising a kind of tyranny over rational discussion. In the field of language learning, for example, 'communicative' and 'autonomous' are both words which have meant so much to so many that any precise meanings have often become blurred. Quite frequently the one has been used in opposition to 'accurate' and the other as a synonym for 'directionless'.

Something similar is taking place in relation to one of the key phrases of the 1990s - 'self-access language learning'. The concept is of course far from new. As many of the contributors to the present volume point out, all successful language learning (possibly all learning) must involve self-access in some form. We have all, in some way and to some degree, made learning choices, selected materials and preferred approaches, learned rather than been taught. Why then is 'self-access' an issue? Why the need for discussion? What is the point of this book?

This is almost certainly related to the constraints and conditions of our age. Never, it would seem, has the demand and perceived need for language learning been so great. The linguist's dream of universal language learning, or *massification des langues* as it has been powerfully, if rather inelegantly, described, appears to be within reach. Yet the human and material resources to support such a major social development are limited.

On one level, therefore, the self-access approach may appear to be the answer to a resourcing and administrative difficulty. This probably does much to explain the current vogue for the term in managerial circles.

It would be easy for linguists to be over-dismissive of this - the 'policy maker's approach'. Easy, but perhaps mistaken - for therein, slightly refashioned, lies a key challenge for educators. For us the question is not: how do we deliver less to more for the same? It is rather: how do we provide the 'mass learner' with the learning competences, opportunities and challenges which are traditionally associated with the education of the few? How can Plato's Symposium be translated into the world of mass communication?

This question, it seems to me, is at the core of the many specific discussions, descriptions and case studies contained within this book. It is our hope that the issue will be confronted by different kinds of readers with differing preoccupations and this hope is reflected in the 'self-accessible' design of the contents.

The immediate stimulus for the chapters which follow was a conference, Self-access and the adult language learner, organised by the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) and the Language Centre of the University of Cambridge in December 1992 at Queen's College, Cambridge. Several one-day conferences on the same theme were also organised during 1993 and 1994 - in Stirling (with Scottish CILT), the Universities of Westminster, Leicester and Bristol.

It was impossible to include many of the contributions made at those conferences and in particular those from colleagues who presented case studies or who organised demonstrations or practical workshops. Both CILT and the editor are anxious to express their thanks to all those who helped make these conferences not only successful but a starting point for thought and reflection.

Despite the institutional pressures alluded to above, a common thread to the varied presentations and discussions at the conferences and to all of the contributors to this book is a commitment to developing learners' independence and to disseminating the concept of learner autonomy. For many, this commitment originated from meeting and working with Yves Châlon, who is remembered by many of the contributors as a remarkable pedagogue and innovator. With its many references to Professor Châlon's writings, this book may perhaps be regarded as an appropriate homage to the founder of the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues.

Introduction

When was the last time you undertook to learn a new foreign language? Can you remember how you went about it? Did you join a class, buy a multimedia pack, go to the country? Or perhaps you tried it all? And above all, were you successful and what benefit did you gain from the experience?

If you were to start a new language now, or wished to improve your ability in a language you studied long ago, chances are that at some stage you would be told to use a self-access centre. What kind of self-access centre would you like as a learner? How would you like to see it organised and what would you expect from it?

This book is an attempt to look at a number of theoretical and practical issues related to the setting up of self-access centres for language learning. The book has been primarily written for educators who are already involved in running such centres or may soon be involved.

Self-access or access to self?

The reason why I started by bombarding the reader with questions is that self-access centres are only as good as their ability to respond to their users' own expectations of language and language learning. Anybody in charge of such a centre can usefully spend time reflecting on her own experience of language learning and her expectations of the 'ideal self-access'. Indeed, one of the main themes of this book is that the success of a centre depends on listening to what learners say and on the ability of the institution to respond to its own users in a dynamic fashion. In a multilingual and multicultural society, diversity rather than uniformity is likely to be the hallmark of self-access language centres.

'Technology is the solution.' *'Sorry, what's the problem?'*

The other main theme of the book concerns the place of technology in self-access. Numbers in higher education and continuing education are increasing all the time, with more and more adults asking to learn languages for communicative purposes. To ease the problems of access to language education and of providing foreign language programmes to ever-increasing numbers, powerful technologies such as high-speed networks able to transport multimedia courseware appear to offer ideal solutions.

Increasing access by means of technology may be necessary but it is far from sufficient. Assuming that all problems will be solved when the network problems are solved and exciting courseware is available is a dream. In reality, language learning by humans remains the problem and we know very little about it. The fact is that, worldwide, the socio-psychological barriers we create for ourselves collectively by the notion 'foreign' are very successful in preventing individuals from learning languages. In other words, **psychological access** is at least as important as **physical access** for language learning.

Self-access centres can be conceived as places where users can - but do not have to - make use of technology for language learning and where learners are helped in their efforts to learn languages by a variety of learner support systems. In particular, the idea is to help learners become more independent and able to exploit foreign language input outside the institution, especially through the mass media.

Tell-me who you are and I'll tell you where to start

This book is a bold attempt to offer a demonstration of a self-access approach: adult language learners, after all, can safely be assumed to be adult readers too.

Depending on your interests and depending on the educational context in which you operate, whether you work in higher education, further education or industry, you will be tempted to concentrate on particular chapters or to skip others. Similarly, your approach to reading this book and your expectations will vary not only with your own experience and familiarity with the concept of self-access but even more with your experience as a language learner and language user. After all, remembering you have mastered at least one language and reflecting on the experience of using, maintaining and updating this language might be the most useful thing to do if you are an absolute beginner in the field.

Moreover, the time available to you will constrain your choices and your immediate motivation may determine your route through the book.

If you have just heard from your university's VC that 500K have to be spent on a new self-access centre for languages before next month and are desperately trying to produce a reasonable plan, you will not approach this book in the same way as a manager putting together a report on the desirability of opening a self-access centre for language learning.

Finally, readers' strategies reflect their learning strategies. Some prefer to start with practical examples and move to more theoretical chapters while others prefer to start with the ideas and move to the applications afterwards.

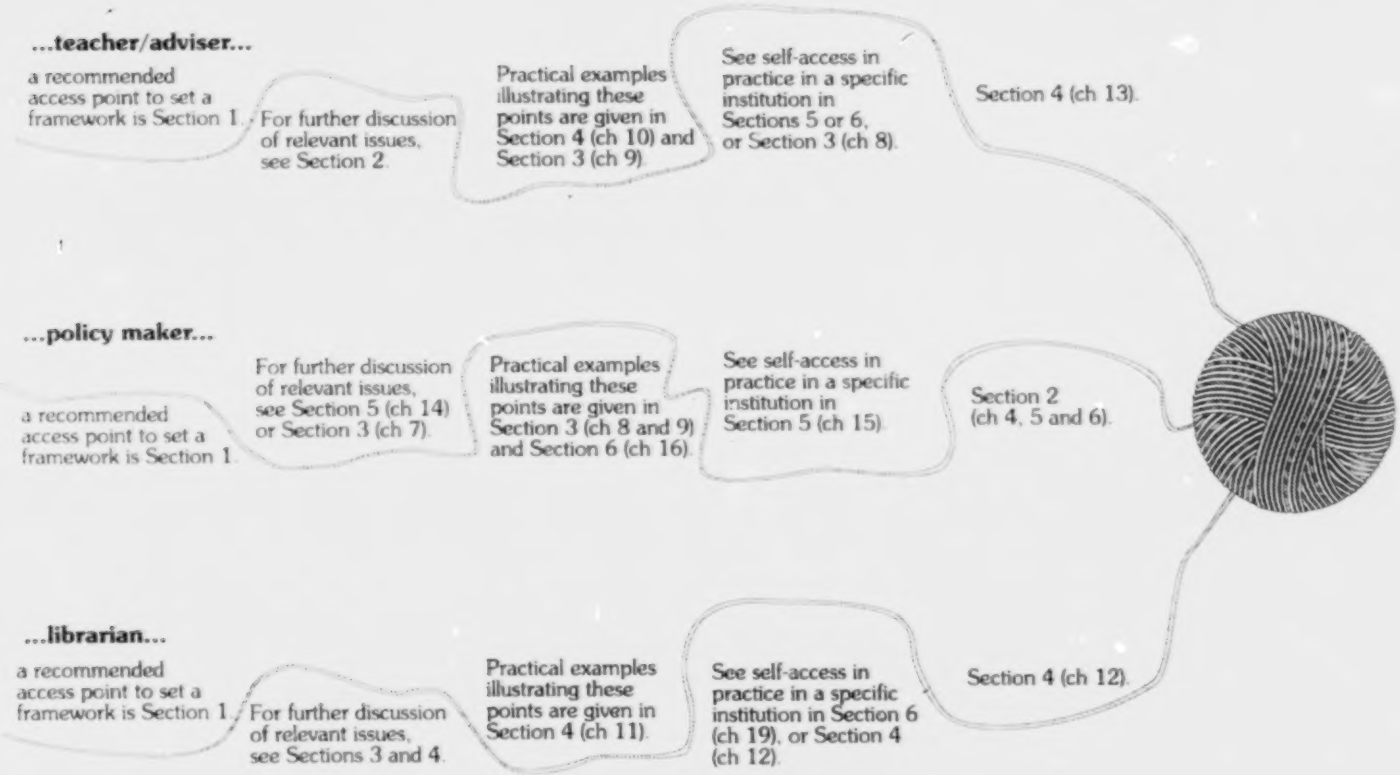
We hope that the following guide, based on your possible functions in a self-access centre for language learning will help you make decisions. We are aware, of course, that most readers wear several hats at the same time in their centre. If this is the case, there is no need to have split personalities. The idea is to make it easier for you to concentrate on those aspects of your work which count most for you at the moment. But, needless to say, if you do not like 'ready-made', disregard the guide altogether and follow your own thread. The only function which really counts is that of the learner. Learners are, must be, will always be, the language learning centre.

SUGGESTED READERS' GUIDE I

for readers with time to learn, read around and think about the issues

If you are working as a...

And of special interest in an industrial context will be...



...teacher/adviser...

a recommended access point to set a framework is Section 1. For further discussion of relevant issues, see Section 2. Practical examples illustrating these points are given in Section 4 (ch 10) and Section 3 (ch 9). See self-access in practice in a specific institution in Sections 5 or 6, or Section 3 (ch 8). Section 4 (ch 13).

...policy maker...

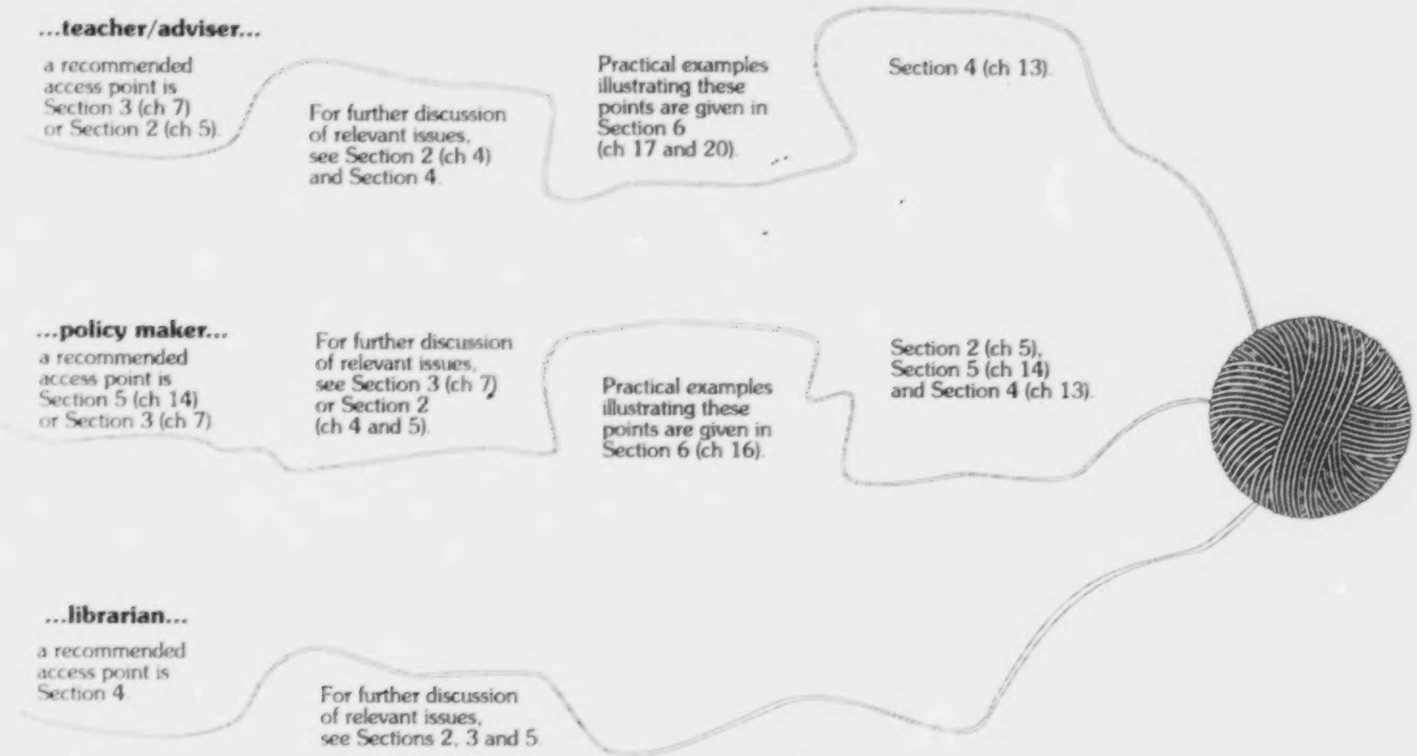
a recommended access point to set a framework is Section 1. For further discussion of relevant issues, see Section 5 (ch 14) or Section 3 (ch 7). Practical examples illustrating these points are given in Section 3 (ch 8 and 9) and Section 6 (ch 16). See self-access in practice in a specific institution in Section 5 (ch 15). Section 2 (ch 4, 5 and 6).

...librarian...

a recommended access point to set a framework is Section 1. For further discussion of relevant issues, see Sections 3 and 4. Practical examples illustrating these points are given in Section 4 (ch 11). See self-access in practice in a specific institution in Section 6 (ch 19), or Section 4 (ch 12). Section 4 (ch 12).

SUGGESTED READERS' GUIDE II

for readers under pressure of time and needing to take action



If you are working as a...

And of special interest in an industrial context will be...

...teacher/adviser...

a recommended access point is Section 3 (ch 7) or Section 2 (ch 5).

For further discussion of relevant issues, see Section 2 (ch 4) and Section 4.

Practical examples illustrating these points are given in Section 6 (ch 17 and 20).

Section 4 (ch 13).

...policy maker...

a recommended access point is Section 5 (ch 14) or Section 3 (ch 7).

For further discussion of relevant issues, see Section 3 (ch 7) or Section 2 (ch 4 and 5).

Practical examples illustrating these points are given in Section 6 (ch 16).

Section 2 (ch 5), Section 5 (ch 14) and Section 4 (ch 13).

...librarian...

a recommended access point is Section 4.

For further discussion of relevant issues, see Sections 2, 3 and 5.

1

Access: realities and dreams

Two fundamental issues need to be addressed by anyone involved in the management or use of self-access systems for language learning, and independently of the context. ***Access to learners' beliefs*** *is the first one.* ***The place of computer technology*** *is the other.*

Access to learners' beliefs is discussed by Philip Riley. Learners have beliefs about languages - what they are, about language learning, what kind of activity it is, and about language learning methods - how to go about it. These beliefs, or 'representations', constitute learners' reality. As such, they directly affect the way learners perceive their needs, the way they set themselves and formulate objectives, the way they manage the learning task and select evaluation criteria. The only way we can have access to learners' representations is by listening to what they say about language and the learning task.

When learners make use of a self-access system, they select catalogue entries, talk to advisers and conduct their programme on the basis of their own beliefs. A self-access system must be organised in a way which takes into account the beliefs of learners. If not, the whole system will be dismissed as irrelevant.

The second issue,(Jeremy Fox and Terry Mayes) concerns the role technology can play in self-access language learning and more particularly computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and hypermedia applications. As usual at times of fast change, there tends to be a polarisation of attitudes towards this new technology. Sometimes it is dismissed altogether; more often it is talked about in quasi religious terms and seems to encapsulate every learner's dream that, somehow, the learning can be done by a machine, quickly, and without effort.

Technology offers solutions; our problem is to specify the problems it solves. *The one crucial point made by both Fox and Mayes is that computers in themselves are not a panacea; they are only tools. Their value to learners depends on what they - and no-one else - can achieve with them. If programs give learners an opportunity to carry out communication tasks which they find really challenging, their understanding of language will improve.*

Suggested readers' guide

This section on the realities and dreams of self-access gives readers an understanding of the starting point of self-access sytems, i.e. learners' beliefs, and of the principles which have to guide their development in terms of technology.

Access point

This section is a good access point for all readers who have the time to set a theoretical framework for approaching self-access.

Suggested follow-up

For further discussion of relevant issues:

- *Teachers/advisers*
  Move on to Section 2.
- *Policy makers*
  See Section 5 (ch 14) and Section 3 (ch 7).
- *Librarians*
  Proceed to Sections 3 and 4.

1. *Aspects of learner discourse: why listening to learners is so important*

PHILIP RILEY

> *A la question* 'Des professeurs, pour quoi faire?' *nous serions tentés de répondre,* 'Des professeurs, pour écouter...'
> Yves Châlon

My topic is language as a social object, that is, representations of language as they are constructed in and through discourse. If you are a practising language teacher, this is a topic of immediate relevance because learners' representations and learner discourse, like Mallory's Mount Everest, are there. And they are in our way. However difficult, however massive the problem, if we want to understand the language learning process better, if we want to help our learners to learn, we have to be prepared to tackle this major obstacle. It is not a matter of intellectual hubris: it is a practical, professional necessity.

Since, for anyone interested in learner-centred approaches in general and self-access in particular, the problem is an urgent one, I propose to look at work being done in a number of disciplines and in particular sociology and discourse analysis, to see if there is anything - ideas, techniques - which can be usefully and insightfully extrapolated to the study of learner discourse and learners' representations. I should warn you that I have no integrated theory, no trick for putting salt on the chicken's tail. But I am an optimist and a 'snapper-up of unconsidered trifles'. Even if there is no fully-fledged machinery available, enough tools have been developed over the last few years to allow us to make a start. So let us begin by looking at some of them.

Representations

The first, oldest and in many ways the most useful tool available to us is the notion of 'representation' itself. I say 'old' because even its earlier etymological forms in Latin express the ideas of 'symbolising' or 'standing for' and as early as the sixteenth century it was being used in relationship to memory and mental imagery - 'presentation to the mind of something already known', in the words of the *Oxford Dictionary of Etymology*. That is still given as one of the most important modern usages: 'the stage or process of mental conservation that consists in the presenting to itself by the mind of objects previously known' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Funk and Wagnalls standard dictionary).

However, it was not until the later nineteenth century that the term 'representations' acquired a social connotation, as in the work of Emile Durkheim. He used the concept of collective representations to refer to a group's symbols and ideas whose social force is considerable because they are created, developed and shared through interaction.

These two meanings of 'representation' explain to a considerable extent an ambiguity that is at the root of much of the present-day debate on the representations of knowledge.

1 On the one hand, we have 'representation' used to refer to aspects of the individual's cognitive processing of information, such as storage and retrieval.

Here, the term is related to the functioning of memory and the lexicon and to knowledge of the internal structures (phonological, morphological and syntactic) of the linguistic code. This approach is essentially psycholinguistic (Kempson, 1988) and within this framework it is possible to say things like 'a sentence is a representation of knowledge: if applied to the language learning process, it will lead directly to the investigation of **interlanguage**, the individual learner's provisional grammar' (Corder, 1982). However, this line of discussion will not be pursued here.

2 On the other hand, we have a social psychological and sociolinguistic use of the word where it is used to refer to group attitudes, values and beliefs. This notion is fundamental to both the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964; Saville-Troike, 1982) and ethnolinguistic vitality theory, though the actual terminology used may vary considerably. If applied to second language acquisition or learning, this approach will lead to the study of developmental sociolinguistics, that is how children acquire communicative competence (Andersen-Slosberg, 1992; Riley, 1993a and 1993b), and to the study of **code-switching**, that is how speakers' alternating between language varieties reveals their representations of social reality and common sense (Hamers and Blanc, 1983; Auer, 1984; Heller, 1984).

It is the second of these two lines of approach which will be followed below. However, a word of caution is necessary, as we are not dealing with two completely watertight categories: after all, a sentence is a social structure, too, and - as the work of Halliday and the systemic grammarians has shown - there are social constraints on grammatical systems. Moreover, both types of 'representation' have to be learnt and there are good reasons for believing that they could be usefully related to other 'dichotomies' such as *langue/parole* and top-down/bottom-up processing.

It might seem, then, that this distinction is immaterial from our point of view. However, there is a crucial difference between the two: it is the difference between the way we think (representations-1) and the way we think we think (representations-2). In other words, representations-2 includes representations about representations-1. (Henceforth, I will refer to these two categories of representations as R1 and R2.) That is, among the common-sense notions, beliefs and values which make up the individual's social reality, there are to be found metalinguistic ideas (in the widest, naïvest sense). These are popular ideas about the nature of language and languages, language structure and language use, the relationship between thought and language, identity and language, language and intelligence, language and learning, and so on. This implies that there will be a qualitative difference between investigations of R1 and investigations of R2: Psycholinguists looking at R1 will work within an objective positivist paradigm, looking for the truth (i.e. the nature of mental processing as understood by psychologists). Sociolinguists, however, will work within a subjective, phenomenological paradigm, looking for their truth (i.e. the nature of the world as understood by members of a society).

Both programmes of investigation are valid, obviously, but here we will be concentrating on those approaches to the identification and study of language learners' R2 which are based on some form of discourse analysis.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

My starting point is a situation which will be very familiar to most readers - the parent-teacher meeting, where participants are expected, at the end of a long day's work, to huddle down in a cold classroom and take decisions about the future of their pupils or progeny.

Over the years, as the father of three children, I must have attended dozens of such meetings; this particular one took place about 18 months ago. The point of this meeting was to decide what each child's second foreign language was to be (in France, almost all children start a second foreign language at age 13).

Discussion of this topic was quite animated: parents took it seriously and the various language teachers present all wanted, naturally enough, to 'sell their wares'. The languages on offer were German, Russian, English and Italian. Each teacher in turn had five minutes to talk about their language and then there was a fairly lengthy questions-and-answers session.

Now, what struck me during this discussion was that it was based on a set of points of agreement about the languages concerned. Parents and teachers alike shared a number of ideas or attitudes which was really quite surprising as, in objective terms, (i) most people present spoke none of the languages and (ii) they had never been brought together as a group before and so had had no previous opportunity to hammer out a common discourse.

Nonetheless, there we all were, cheerfully and confidently passing judgements on these languages, both separately and in relationship to one another. For example, it went without saying that some languages were 'more grammatical' or 'had more grammar' than others. Languages were also more or less 'difficult' - though not necessarily because they had more grammar or less grammar. Languages vary in the degree of beauty they possess, too. Perhaps unfortunately, the beauty of a language has nothing to do with how useful it is; but we were there to discuss our children's careers so we paid a lot of attention to whether or not they were useful.

Such was the consensus on these matters that it was really quite easy to rank each of the languages along the four parameters I have mentioned.

	Grammatical	**Difficult**	**Beautiful**	**Useful**
First	German	Russian	Italian	English
Second	Russian	English	Russian	German/ Russian
Third	Italian	German	English	Italian
Fourth	English	Italian	German	

GRAMMATICAL

The 'most grammatical' language was, without any doubt, German. This is almost certainly a direct reflection of those parents' language learning experience* (and their parents', and their grandparents'): but, after all, social stereotypes have to come from somewhere.

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* Editor's note: The meeting took place in Nancy, France, which is the capital of the province of Lorraine where, until about 1955, secondary school pupils traditionally learnt German as their first second language.

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Close behind was Russian. Eyes were rolled to indicate just how grammatical Russian is and heads were shaken. Two parents admitted that they had never even dared start to learn Russian because they knew it was so grammatical. Interestingly, this led to a lengthy debate on just how much more grammar German has than Russian: interesting because to the best of my knowledge, the only person present who knew a word of Russian was the Russian teacher. Yet everybody had a clear point of view.

Italian, on the other hand, has very little grammar and English, you will be pleased to learn, has **no grammar at all**.

DIFFICULT

The most difficult of the four languages is Russian, as can be seen by the very small numbers of pupils who choose to learn Russian each year. Russian is difficult, because it has so much grammar. English is difficult because it has no grammar. They are both difficult because they are difficult to pronounce. Russian is difficult to pronounce 'because of the cyrillic alphabet'. And English is particularly difficult to pronounce (I quote) 'when spoken by an American'. German is not really that difficult: 'once you know the grammar', of course. And Italian is **easy**.

BEAUTIFUL

It was along this parameter that the four languages were most clearly separated. The most beautiful language is Italian (or should I have used 'musical' here, as many participants did?). Not only was this belief held by everybody present, it was held with conviction, and a degree of intensity which I find difficult to describe and harder to explain.

Russian is quite beautiful, too. English is not. And German, despite the fact that we live only 80 miles from the German border, is regarded literally as a joke.

USEFUL

English may be difficult, ungrammatical and not terribly beautiful, but there is no doubt that it is by far and away the most useful of all languages. Strangely enough, this is not always perceived as positive by speakers of French, who see its very usefulness as contributing even further to its lack of grammatical rules, but issues of ethnolinguistic vitality cannot be discussed here.

German and Russian drew when it came to usefulness. This may well have been because this was the only aspect of this whole topic that was explicitly discussed, with the German teacher pointing out that German was now the biggest single language community in Europe as well as being the main foreign language in Eastern Europe and the Russian teacher insisting on a bright future for Russian-speaking businessmen. Italian? With the sole exception of future historians of Art, useless.

I could have added a fifth dimension, something like 'cultural, educational and intellectual value' and there was in fact a lot of discussion - and agreement - on these topics. My reason for not doing so is that all four languages were highly regarded from this point of view: this is not really surprising, of course, as they are all historical, national, standard languages (like French!) possessing rich literatures. It is symptomatic that throughout the discussion participants used the same kind of paraphrase to refer to each language - '*la langue de Shakespeare (Goethe, Dante, Tolstoï)*'. There were some differences, of course: German was compared directly with mathematics - it trains your mind, partly because it has lots of grammar, partly because works written in German are reputed to be impenetrably difficult to understand - Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Habermas... Russian and Italian, interestingly, train your emotions - Russians have souls, whilst Italians have temperaments and both contribute to one's sentimental education. English is the language of science and commerce, in French eyes something of a necessary evil.

Now I do not want to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but it will be quite obvious to you that from an objective, scientific-linguistic point of view, these opinions are either plain wrong or subjective. Running through the list very briefly, we can make the following observations:

- **Grammar**: Languages do not have more or less of it. As studies in computational linguistics and psycholinguistics have shown, languages carry very similar structural and informational loads, probably due to the systems constraints imposed by the brain. What these parents mean by 'more grammar' is morphology and in particular word endings - suffixes and inflexions - a representation which is highly 'eurocentric'. The load is spread around differently in different languages, so that a language which is 'simple' in one respect may be 'difficult' in another. English, for example, has relatively simple morphology and relatively complex word order.

- **Difficulty** is not just a matter of grammar. At any level of the linguistic hierarchy (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics) difficulties may crop up. Moreover, 'difficulties' are not just the result of objective differences and distances between two language systems, as the history of contrastive linguistics has shown. To take just one example: the French, as we have seen, are convinced that Italian is easy, yet from a 'purely' phonetic point of view Russian pronunciation is nearer to their own articulatory set. Again, the high degree of transparency between many French and Italian words and expressions can be misleading, since there are also very large numbers of *faux-amis*, words which look the same but which have different meanings. (French teachers of Italian have a dreadful time persuading their pupils not just to speak French with an Italian accent!)

- **Beauty** is in the ear of the beholder. Moreover, if beauty really is a matter of a phonological system with a high proportion of 'pure vowels' (another very powerful representation), then both Finnish and Hawaiian have claims to be the world's most beautiful language.

- **Use**: At first glance, this seems to be an objective and uncontroversial dimension: after all, we can calculate, however approximately, which languages are the most used and possibly even the most useful. But as soon as we turn from use to need, from large-scale sociolinguistic trends to individuals in real-life situations, things become more complicated. To put it in a nutshell, in the words of a businessman questioned on this topic: '*The most useful language is the one spoken by my next customer*'.

In my own work with bilingual children, I have very often heard people say things like '*Ah yes, but what use is Norwegian? (or Votyak or Tukano or whatever)*'. The fact that the child in question uses Norwegian to talk to his/her grandparents, cousins and friends and possibly father and mother is brushed aside because you cannot use Norwegian to programme computers. From the perspective of the individual child this is, of course, nonsense.

It is not difficult for the linguist to show that descriptions such as 'grammatical', 'beautiful', 'difficult' and 'useful' are subjective, vague and inaccurate. Indeed, insofar as they pay any attention to such matters at all, most linguists would regard themselves as having the vocation to correct such errors. However, learners are not linguists (nor are their parents or even their teachers). When learners choose what language they are going to learn they do so on the basis not of scientific linguistic arguments but of notions such as 'grammar', 'beauty', 'difficulty', 'use', and so on. However unreal these notions may be objectively, they directly influence the real-life behaviour of the people concerned.

As W I Thomas put it: '*Whatever is perceived as real is real in its consequences*'. In other words, in ordinary life people do not go round thinking or taking decisions on the basis of scientific reality, but on the basis of **their** reality. If I believe, for example, that French is more logical, more cultured and more grammatical than English, I may well conclude (and there is evidence from many different parts of the world that this is what learners do conclude) that it is both easier to make mistakes in French than in English and a more serious matter if you do so. So, I might admire or even love French - but learn and use English, which is easy and more tolerant of mistakes. Paradoxically, then, someone might end up speaking English so as not to offend against their image of French, as is the case, apparently, in parts of South East Asia.

Clearly, when people use words like 'Russian', 'German', 'English' and 'Italian' in situations like this, they are using them to refer to social objects, their representations. I have been arguing that **it is extremely important for us to have access to those representations**, since they are major influences on the learning process in the widest possible sense, including institutional and individual decisions as to what languages are worth learning, motivation, the nature of language and the nature of learning ('linguistic culture' and 'learning culture').

How can we study such representations? Since we cannot split open peoples' brains and examine them under a microscope, we have to study them in use, as part of discourse. Discourse - conversation, gossip, PTA meetings - is the major mechanism for the maintenance of group values, beliefs, attitudes and representations. But discourse analysis is a notoriously complex business. Sometimes, there seem to be as many theories of discourse as there are analysts. How can we choose the approach that suits us best? I think that as language teachers we have to be very pragmatic here, which means:

- We will not look for **the** approach, the single theory that will answer all our problems. We will be eclectic, using any available conceptual or methodological tools which seem appropriate, even if they are contradictory, in purely theoretical terms.

- We have to keep our eye on the ball, that is, to remember what aspect of discourse we are mainly interested in, i.e. representations. Only those models and techniques which target representations in one way or another will be considered.

With these admittedly rudimentary 'criteria' for the selection of models for the analysis of learner discourse, let us now scratch around the field and see just what unconsidered trifles we can find.

Metaphor

The first, as my laboured lead-in indicates, is metaphor. Not metaphor as lists of colourful expressions or figures of speech, but metaphor as the basis of all language and cognition, the organising principle of knowledge and of the representation of knowledge. 'Metaphors we live by', to use the title of Johnson and Lakoff's (1981) seminal book on the topic. As they showed, it is often possible to describe and account for considerable numbers of seemingly disparate expressions by identifying or postulating some underlying master metaphor ('time is money', 'anger is heat', etc) on which they are based. We ring the changes on these master metaphors to refer to different aspects of reality. But these metaphorical expressions are not merely superficial stylistic devices, they are how and what we know, the ways in which our knowledge about the world is systematised, organised and represented, conceptual grids for the categorisation of experience.

Let us extend this approach to discourse about language and language learning. Studying the discourse of English learners of French has led me to postulate the existence of a master metaphor: '*a language is a liquid*'.

Shortage of space precludes any detailed analysis of this metaphorical domain, but the following examples should suffice to indicate the drift of the argument. There are many words in English which can be used to describe both the sounds of water and of speech:

- babble
- bubble
- prattle
- murmur
- spout
- leak
- chatter
- roar
- gurgle
- gush
- meander

etc

In some cases, indeed, the two meanings are so closely identified that it is arguable as to which is the literal and which the figurative one: be that as it may, it is clear that not all are synonyms by any means. Again, it is possible to find expressions emphasising particular aspects, such as the force or quantity of the liquid/language concerned:

- to speak fluently
- a torrent of words
- a stream of invective
- in full spate
- floods of rhetoric
- to pour out your feelings
- to vent your anger
- a trickle of information

As regards learning a language, we find:

- to absorb what someone is saying
- to soak it up like a sponge
- an immersion course
- just let it sink in

It is not clear as to exactly how the existence and use of such a master metaphor might influence learning, though personally I am convinced it does so in an immediate and profound way. To take just one (completely speculative) example: liquids, by definition, are uniform, in the sense that any one drop has all and only the properties of any other. Might not a learner who believes language to be a liquid, then, have great difficulty in adapting to a methodology based on the principle that specific needs and situations call on specific areas of linguistic and communicative competence, not on the whole language?

Belief systems

Let us now turn to look at learners' discourse in terms of what some researchers (particularly those with a background in ethnolinguistics and social psychology) call belief systems. This is a fascinating and complex field, but I think its relevance for us can be summarised as follows: the individual's perception of ethnolinguistic reality, i.e. his or her representation of the linguistic situation, varies according to the beliefs, the interpretative tools, available to and through the group of which he/she is a member. In other words, behaviour as a member of a group and with respect to other groups, will vary according to beliefs about the language situation: and language learning is a crucial aspect of that behaviour.

Over the last three to four years, I have been using Allard and Landry's (1986) model of 'subjective ethnolinguistic vitality viewed as a belief system' to examine the discourse of (among others) English adult learners of French. I think this belief system approach is useful for at least two reasons.

- It provides counsellors and self-access centre staff with an analytic framework for categorising learners' statements. I quite appreciate that many counsellors, particularly the more experienced ones, can and do react to learner statements without ever having heard of ethno-linguistic vitality theory or belief systems. Nonetheless, many find this useful as a systematising observational tool, by which I mean quite simply that things are often easier to spot if you are on the lookout for them, as any ornithologist will tell you.

- Moreover, this allows counsellors and self-access centre staff to draw up group profiles, the importance and usefulness of which cannot be stressed enough, especially if the group in question is new to self-access, as is the case, say, in many of the institutions of higher education in Hong Kong.

Obviously, this approach has its limits: for example, it is better at identifying problems than solving them; it has no real explanatory force. On the other hand, stripped bare like this, it requires little technical knowledge to use and, after all, counsellors and self-access centre staff have enough on their hands without having to become specialists in discourse analysis too.

In outline, then, this model provides four categories of belief. They are represented under the following points with examples:

1 General beliefs

General beliefs establish factual (is/is not) relationships between meaning values which convey information about people, objects, events and situations or combinations thereof (Allard and Landry, op. cit.). E.g. 'small children often have pretty awful table manners'.

Examples:
- To learn a language you need a teacher, preferably a native speaker.
- You need to follow a course, in a class with a textbook.
- The younger you are, the easier it is to learn a language.
- You have to start at the beginning.
- You have to start with the simple parts.
- The only real way to learn a language is to spend a long time in the country where it is spoken.

- French is a beautiful language.
- French is very difficult, especially the pronunciation.
- French is useful.

2 Beliefs about self

These *reflect relationships between meaning values which convey information about any aspect of self, i.e. habits, actions, abilities, feelings, sensations etc* (Allard and Landry, op. cit.). E.g. 'I have very nice table manners'.

Examples:

- I don't think I'll ever learn to speak French properly. I can manage the vocabulary and grammar and reading is easy, but I'm not gifted for languages and it is speaking and pronunciation that is the problem.
- Some people are gifted for languages. They have a good ear, they just pick it up. I am/am not one of those people.
- I need to be made to learn by a good teacher. Otherwise I'm just not disciplined enough.
- I sound stupid/childish/English when I speak French.

3 Beliefs about norms and rules

These *reflect normative relationships (should/should not) between norms and rules of an ethical or non-ethical nature applied to people, situations, or combinations of aspects of these* (Allard and Landry, op. cit.). E.g. 'small children ought to have decent table manners'.

Examples:

- French is much more difficult to pronounce than English, or most other languages, I think.
- People say French is clearer and more logical; it may be true, because French has much more grammar.
- You have to be much more polite in French, at least as far as the words go, but people can interrupt at any time and in lectures and meetings they have conversations openly.
- French doesn't vary like English does. You speak like you write and there aren't so many accents.
- The most important part, and the most difficult, is learning the grammar.
- Some languages have more grammar than others. In some languages, the rules are not so important as others.
- The French get easily offended if you make mistakes. They look down on you.

4 Beliefs about goals

These *reflect desired relationships between meaning values intended to convey information about one's desiring or aspiring to act, behave, experience, process, etc* (Allard and Landry, op. cit.). E.g. 'I want my children to acquire proper table manners'.

Examples:

- There is not much point in an English speaker learning foreign languages.
- There is only one important language - the one spoken by your customer.
- People from small countries learn lots of foreign languages because they are highly motivated.
- The ideal aim is to speak like a native speaker, but of course you can't.
- You should try to learn as many words as possible.

- You need to learn the ordinary language before you start a language for specialised purposes.
- I just want to be able to make myself understood.
- What I had to do is learn to read, but really I want to speak more.
- If you want to get to know the French, you've just got to learn their language.

The studies mentioned above have shown this approach to be an extremely insightful one in the investigation of ethnolinguistic attitudes and behaviour. One only has to consider the examples given by Allard and Landry to see, albeit intuitively, why this should be so:

'Anglophones control most of the businesses and industries in my community.'

'I feel that I may not have the ability to succeed in the anglophone business community.'

'It is legitimate that anglophones maintain control of most of the industries and business in this community.'

'I would like to be accepted within the anglophone business community.'

The interpretative repertoire

I am using the expression 'the interpretative repertoire' here in the sense in which it is used by discourse analysts of the 'Loughborough school', in particular Wetherall and Potter (1988), Norman Fairclough (1992) and Michael Billig (1987). In purely discourse analytic terms their work is the most interesting in the field because it attempts to relate 'top-down', theory-driven analysis of the continental type (Foucault, Althusser, Bourdieu, Pecheur, Habermas) to the 'bottom-up', data-driven analysis of the British tradition. In other words, they try to analyse particular instances of discourse as manifestations of ideologies, which is where we come in, because ideologies are both made of and condition social representations.

However, the example is not taken from their work as, to the best of my knowledge, they have never looked at topics like language learning and self-access. Instead, let us consider briefly a PhD thesis by Hilde Gevers-Schmitt (1992) on the notion of 'fluency' in a foreign language. She set out to study just what the term fluency means to populations of native speakers of Flemish, Spanish and US English. It would be impossible to summarise her work as regards its methodology and scope as it consists of 300 pages of tightly-packed discussion, data and sophisticated statistical analysis, but basically, she conducted one-hour individual interviews with each of her subjects, and she also recorded them all speaking a foreign language and then discussed the recording with them. Her main conclusions can be described, without too much trivialisation, as:

1 On the one hand, 'fluency' is a social construct of a highly complex kind. An indication of just how complex can be obtained from Gevers-Schmitt's list of 'Factors influencing speaker fluency' (given below). (It should be kept in mind that she has other such lists for fluency as a percept, cross-cultural variants, etc.) These factors will occur in and be perceived as differing configurations to produce different 'types' of 'fluency'; moreover, they can be related to other parameters, such as profession, age, first language, degree of linguistic sophistication and so forth.

2 On the other hand, it is possible to identify just four clear levels of fluency with high in-group and inter-group consistency which Gevers-Schmitt calls in ascending order (for oral expression):

- expressing oneself fluently;
- speaking fluently;
- conversing fluently;
- being fluent.

Factors influencing speaker fluency
(in the foreign language) (after Gevers-Schmitt, 1992)

+ means positive influence - means negative influence

I	Knowledge of the foreign language: six factors are mentioned e.g.: (+) having been taught the foreign language well
II	Production in the foreign language: two positive factors are mentioned 1. (+) ease of expression in the mother tongue 2. (+) efficient communication in the mother tongue
III	Physical factors: fifteen negative factors are mentioned e.g.: (-) motor difficulties
IV	Situational factors: three different types of situations are mentioned 1. Non-spontaneous (i.e.(-) examinations) 2. Informal (i.e.(+) home) 3. Other (i.e.(-) very noisy place)
V	Sociolinguistic factors: four categories of factors are distinguished 1. Addressee's identity: eight factors are mentioned e.g.: (-) superior in relation to speaker 2. Addressee's age and sex: six factors are mentioned e.g.: (+) same sex as speaker 3. Addressee's comprehension: two factors are mentioned e.g.: (+) understands speaker 4. Speaker's mother tongue: three factors are mentioned e.g.: (+/-) addressee is a native speaker
VI	Personal factors: five categories 1. Speaker's character: nine factors mentioned e.g.: (-) too perfectionist 2. Speaker's age: four factors are mentioned e.g.: (-) puberty 3. Speaker's sex 4. Speaker's intelligence and education: six factors are mentioned e.g.: (+) good memory 5. Other: thirteen factors are mentioned e.g.: (+) married to a native speaker
VII	Conversational topic type: three types are mentioned e.g.: (-) difficult topics, i.e. personal problems
VIII	Psychological factors: twenty-four factors listed! e.g.: (-) stress

This work is an excellent example of the way in which items of the interpretative repertoire can be scrutinised through relatively straightforward interviewing techniques and fairly sophisticated statistical trawling and manipulation. Gevers-Schmitt also ploughed through linguistic texts for 'professional' definitions of the term so that she could then juxtapose the experts' definitions/representations of fluency with learners' representations.

More work of this kind is necessary, partly because there can be misunderstandings of the simplest kinds between counsellors and learners. For example, in the CRAPEL archives, we have recordings of a series of learner/counsellor conversations in which the topic of 'accent' is frequently mentioned and where it slowly becomes clear that counsellor and learner are using it very differently indeed: for the counsellor, 'accent' is limited to phonological variation, whereas for the learner it includes grammar, vocabulary and, indeed, almost any kind of variation from his representation of the norm.

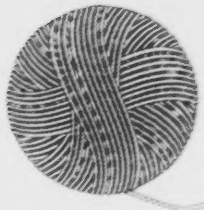
There can also be misunderstandings of a more insidious kind, as, for example, where learners pick up expressions from counsellors and use them outside the counsellor's interpretative repertoire. A typical case would be the French adult learner of English who used the expression 'oral comprehension' very differently from the counsellor, probably because it was not opposed in his overall repertoire to the same system of concepts (oral expression, written expression, etc).

This work is important, because notions like 'fluency' have immediate repercussions on learners' aims, such as the level which they want and hope to attain, and on their perceptions as to how and what they need to do to get there. Other terms which could benefit from rigorous examination of this kind are those mentioned during our earlier discussion of the PTA (beauty, usefulness, difficulty, grammar), as well as comprehension, need, learn... the list is a long one.

Conclusion

Why look at learners' representations? 'Because they are there.' And because they are there, they influence and filter learning behaviour at every level, including the learner's perceptions of self-access centres and the use which they can make of them.

Therefore, if we plan self-access centres - however 'high-tech', however rich in materials, however full of supportive counsellors - without taking those representations into account, such centres will be doomed to failure. We need to know - and learners need to know - what it is that they think they are learning and what they think that 'learning' is.



2. Demystifying IT in second language learning

Jeremy Fox

> *La démythification du maître s'accompagnera par la démythification de l'étudiant, et chacun, rendu à son ignorance, pourra en tâtonnant découvrir des voies nouvelles.* (Châlon, 1970)

The peripheral nature of CALL

This paper begins with a quotation from Châlon's *Vers une pédagogie sauvage*, in which he talks of demystifying teacher and student alike. Starting with an attempt to demythologise or demystify information technology (IT), the paper then goes on to consider how useful IT might actually be in foreign language learning. These reflections are hung round an outline history of computer-assisted language learning (CALL).

CALL is an approach to language learning and teaching which has been in existence for over thirty years, but which is still not widely accepted or used by language teachers. Lack of resources may be one reason for this slow development: in many educational institutions, computers are allocated to science and mathematics before modern languages. Another explanation may be the suspicions and hostility of language teachers, perhaps aroused by a widespread feeling in society that 'computers are better than people', and therefore that suitably programmed computers could replace teachers. Thus, if some language teachers feel personally or professionally threatened by the spread of IT, they may even be right.

Two related dubious beliefs need to be recognised and queried from the outset. The first is that information technology is soon going to revolutionise the teaching and learning of second languages - experience to date suggests that this is very unlikely. The other is that it is possible to replace language teachers with computers - it is not.

The attempt to demystify computer-assisted language learning, to strip it of the layers of erroneous belief and confusion that surround it, is a necessary first step to making reasonable suggestions as to its use. The processes of demystification and speculation emerge from the writer's underlying view of the role of language. This view sees language as a vehicle for interpersonal relationships, and therefore, to a considerable degree, as concerned with the personal and the human. (Communication, therefore, can be seen as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself.) However, to recognise that language is about the human and the personal also involves the recognition that it is only rarely that it concerns individuals alone. More normally, it is used between pairs, groups and communities. This has implications for the ways in which language learning tasks and processes are encouraged or set up.

Against the background of these varied aims and beliefs, the rest of the paper will offer a thumbnail sketch of the history of CALL up to the present, and a discussion of lessons for today.

An outline history of CALL, and possible implications

THE AGE OF BEHAVIOURISM (1960 - 1970)

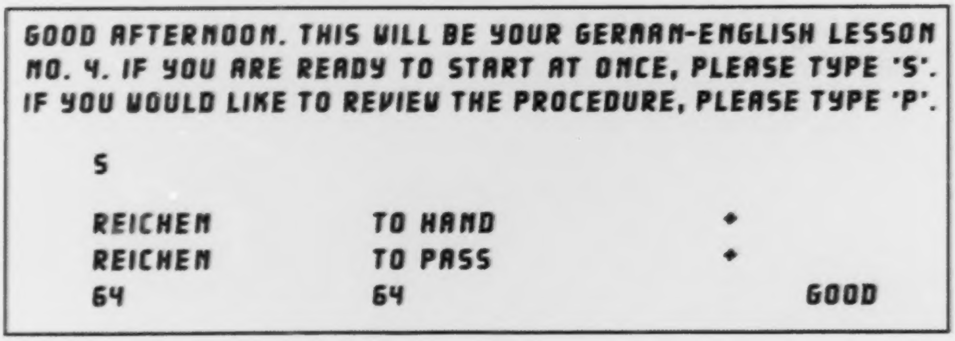
The first CALL programs were based on programmed learning and exemplified its principles. Behaviourism is a school of psychology concerned with externally observable and measurable behaviour. The form of behaviourism underlying both teaching machines and audiolingual language teaching is operant conditioning, which is associated with B F Skinner and which states that when a piece of behaviour is reinforced, it is likely to reoccur. In the language laboratory, if a student makes a response and then hears the correct response on the tape, this is said to reinforce the behaviour, and she receives positive reinforcement. If, however, she hears that the correct response is different, the incorrect response is negatively reinforced, and is less likely to reoccur. The whole process is called operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953, p65). The same principles of operant responses and reinforcements were believed to apply in all learning situations, whether with rats pushing levers in cages, or students working in language laboratories or at teaching machines.

Many CALL exercises in the sixties were based on principles of operant conditioning. They conventionally included gap-filling and sentence completion exercises, as were commonly also found on teaching machines. (It is sobering to note how common such forms of practice still are today, thirty years later.) Practice material tended to fit in with established methodological conventions. At that time grammar-translation was still strong, with an emphasis on translation and the study of the grammar of the target language. In opposition to grammar-translation, audiolingualism had established itself in the USA and Canada, and in areas under their influence. (Most of the initial development work in what was revealingly called 'computer-assisted instruction' was carried out in North America. In Britain, the term computer-assisted learning or CAL has been more common.) Audiolingual practice eschewed all grammatical analysis and emphasised spoken drill of grammatical 'patterns' or 'structures', in an attempt to 'stamp them in'. The meaning of what was being said was seen as secondary. Getting the form right ('making the right response') was what mattered.

AN EARLY CALL PROGRAM

To get an idea of the first forms of CALL, here is an example from an early German program, by J C R Licklider (1962). At first, it looks like a translation exercise, fitting in best with a grammar-translation approach. The student's responses are shown on the right.

+ = right   - = wrong   ta = try again?
y = yes   n = no   /// = show right answer



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GOOD AFTERNOON. THIS WILL BE YOUR GERMAN-ENGLISH LESSON
NO. 4. IF YOU ARE READY TO START AT ONCE, PLEASE TYPE 'S'.
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO REVIEW THE PROCEDURE, PLEASE TYPE 'P'.

     S

     REICHEN          TO HAND              +
     REICHEN          TO PASS              +
     64               64                           GOOD
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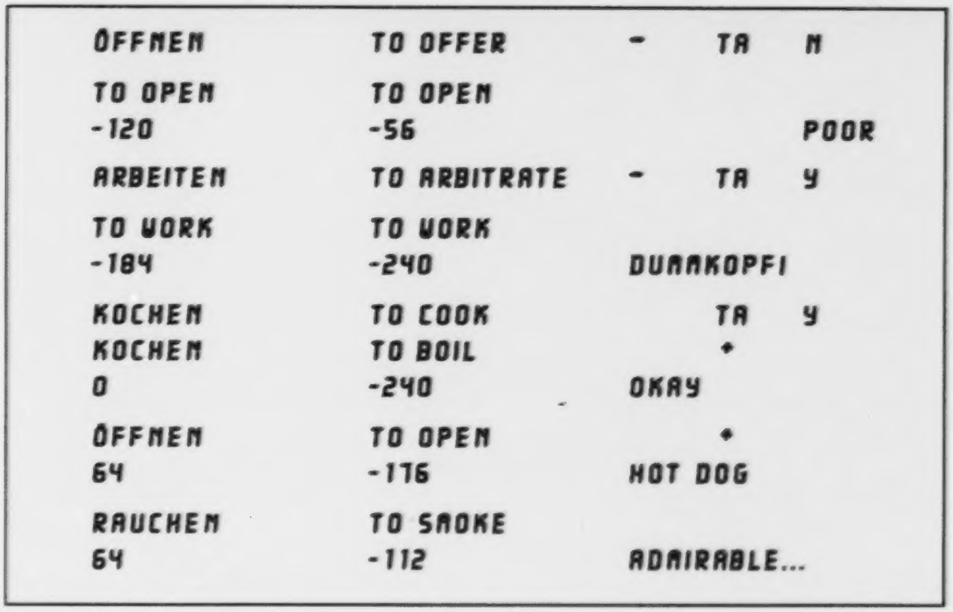

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ÖFFNEN          TO OFFER        -    TA   N
TO OPEN         TO OPEN
-120            -56                       POOR
ARBEITEN        TO ARBITRATE    -    TA   Y
TO WORK         TO WORK
-184            -240            DUMMKOPF!
KOCHEN          TO COOK              TA   Y
KOCHEN          TO BOIL              +
0               -240            OKAY
ÖFFNEN          TO OPEN              +
64              -176            HOT DOG
RAUCHEN         TO SMOKE
64              -112            ADMIRABLE...
```

The use of scoring devices, as illustrated here, is still common in some programs, as is the use of positive or negative comments, often selected by the computer on a random basis. It is worth noting here that scoring is only practicable when there is a single 'correct response' available, something which in real life is uncommon. (What, for example, is the 'correct response' to a greeting of 'Good morning'?) Also interesting is the systematic reintroduction of words like *öffnen* which the learner has got wrong. 'Progressive features' include both the choice for the learner whether to try again, and also for him or her to type '///' for the correct answer. Thus, a degree of learner control is available.

DRILL AND PRACTICE

Licklider's own commentary on the program reveals that he sees it as an 'automated drill' (Licklider, 1962, p217). The whole pedagogy is behaviourist. Thus the system provides 'immediate knowledge of results' to provide feedback or 'reinforcement'. The use of 'paired associates' in the form of translation equivalents to be 'overlearned' by being 'stamped in' to the point of automaticity (Skinner, 1953, p60) is part of the battery of techniques associated with behaviourist programmed learning. In other words, language is conceived of as a habit structure, and language learning is seen as the formation of habits. The techniques include bringing about 'overlearning' through operant conditioning so that simply seeing on the screen the word *öffnen* will bring the immediate correct response 'open' automatically, without any thinking being required.

For Licklider, paired associate learning offers a means of automating education, and thus making it 'cost-effective' and even 'scientific'. These magic phrases are as alive today as they were thirty years ago. But to describe the performance of this exercise as 'vocabulary learning' is unsatisfactory. For example, what does it mean to know a word as a paired associate, to have the English word 'horse' trigger off the French *cheval*? What does this conditioned response tell us of the syntactic behaviour and semantic value of *cheval*, of the contexts in which it can appear, of the words with which it can collocate, of the network of associations within which it is used (Richards, 1985, pp176-188)? Language cannot be properly understood as though it were made up of isolated units, to be learned one by one as separate units. As Rutherford remarks:

> *The conception of increasing language proficiency as a development reflected in a steady accumulation of more and more complex language entities is a difficult one to maintain, once one looks a little more closely at what language learners actually do in the course of their learning.* (Rutherford, 1987, pp5-6)

CHOMSKY AND VAIN REPETITIONS

And then there is the problem of tedium. While not best known as a language teaching methodologist, Chomsky once discussed audiolingual teaching methods of English as a foreign language. He describes a visit to Puerto Rico:

> Well, my wife and I were taken to some of the schools to see what was happening, and we found that they were teaching English according to the latest scientific theories. These latest scientific theories at that time said that language is a habit system, and the way you learn language is just by learning the habits. So it is kind of like catching a ball or something like that. You just keep doing it over and over again until you get good at it. They used a system they called pattern practice. You have a certain linguistic pattern, and you just repeat it over and over again. Well, the thing that is most obvious about these methods is that they are so boring that they put you to sleep in about three minutes. So when you go into a classroom you see that the children are looking out of the windows or throwing things at the teacher or something like that. They may be paying enough attention so they can repeat what the teacher wants them to say, but it's clear that they are going to forget it about three minutes later. Well, that goes on for twelve years, five days a week, and the results are predictably close to zero. (...)
>
> The proper conclusion, I think, is this: use your common sense and use your experience and don't listen too much to the scientists, unless you find that what they say is really of practical value and of assistance in understanding the problems you face, as sometimes it truly is.

(Chomsky, 1988, p181)

Implications: 'old wine in new bottles'

What conclusions can be drawn from this glimpse of CALL in the sixties which are relevant to foreign language learning in the nineties? First of all, it would seem wise to treat behaviourism in language learning with considerable scepticism. The need for this suspicion continues today. Drill and practice are still widely used in language learning courseware. Such materials often value getting the 'right response' more than understanding what you are saying. Thus they frequently emphasise form over meaning; and encourage echoic, teacher-dominated performance over creative or innovative use of language. While it is comparatively easy to transfer structure drills from the language laboratory into CALL programs, and to produce CALL exercises which are essentially spoken drill in written form, this sort of drilling is unlikely to have more than a limited role in second language acquisition.

There is also a good case for mistrusting the experts or 'scientists', as Chomsky suggests above. To take one or two examples which should be taken with a pinch of salt, one might include the following beliefs:

- 'overlearning' through multiple repetitions is very important;
- meaning is a 'distraction to learning';
- the formal study of grammar is a waste of time. This means that one should 'study the language and not about the language'.

Multimedia today (1993) provides the latest example of unwarranted claims accepted with gullible acquiescence. 'Old wine in new bottles' is a fair description of much present multimedia, technologically sophisticated, but deeply antiquated methodologically, drill and practice with pictures and sound added. Equally, we should be suspicious of the notion, promoted by industry and government alike, of IT as the solution to society's problems. Using multimedia is no guarantee of learning.

Similarly, in the general area of second language acquisition, one needs to take with a pinch of salt the claims of Krashen when he states, to take one example, that language learned formally in a classroom has to be reacquired informally before it is available for communication (Krashen, 1983, pp83-89).

PLATO and the age of mainframe CALL (1970 - 1980)

PLATO

The years between 1970 and 1980 were ones in which CALL development was slow. Two main developments occurred in CALL at this time. The first, the emergence of intelligent CALL ('iCALL'), using the techniques of artificial intelligence, is extremely interesting but very specialised, and will not be discussed here. The second resulted from the way in which mainframe computers grew in memory size and processing power. This development made possible the introduction of powerful international computer-assisted learning (CAL) systems, of which the best known is the Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operation (PLATO). This was a large-scale mainframe-based CAL system, spanning different continents. It offered instruction in a range of subjects, including the languages English, French, German, Latin, Spanish and Russian (Alessi and Trollip, 1985, p48). The system was highly centralised, based on a large computer at the University of Illinois, with hundreds of terminals, and with connections overseas. The system had facilities to help teachers to author their own CALL software, a particularly popular feature with teachers (Smith and Sherwood, 1971). Typical forms of language practice were translation and grammar exercises, with detailed correction and feedback (Ariew, 1974, p4). Nevertheless, the main drive of PLATO was in a machine-centred or teacher-centred instructional paradigm, criticised by Denenberg:

> *It simply was not designed to have students teach the computers, it was designed for the computer to teach the students in the form of canned or prewritten programs aptly named 'lessons'. A shame - here we have an instance of 'the student as captive'. (...) I also remember a management attitude of 'students can't really be trusted' and a sense of a definite power hierarchy of student/author/course director/PLATO project programmer (each of which had more secret codes than the next whereby he could unlock more of the information within the system).* (Denenberg, 1978, p6)

LEARNER NEEDS: ACCESS AND CONTROL

Denenberg's critique seems to come from a learner-centred, humanistic perspective which sees it as important to value one's students. In the face of the technological sophistication and machine-centred approach of the PLATO system, he raises questions about human needs, such as access and learner control. Large systems like PLATO may appear monolithic and machine-centred, with little space for the needs of individual learners. However, if autonomy is to be taken as an appropriate goal, there is no need for them to be designed in such a way as to deprive learners of control of their learning processes. So the main problem with PLATO, as perceived by Denenberg, may have been more in the lack of vision of the pedagogic philosophy rather than in the size and complexity of the system.

In general, the PLATO language programs were admired for the power of their grammar teaching exercises. Grammar teaching and learning have been out of fashion for some years, but in some areas seem to be staging a comeback. There has been considerable academic debate about such matters as grammar learning and the role of instruction in language learning. Some believe that formal instruction of grammar is productive for language learning for certain learners in certain situations (Lightbrown, 1985; Long, 1983; Ellis, 1992). An alternative position is that grammatical consciousness-raising aids language learning, but does not instill competence (Rutherford, 1987: chapters 2, 5 and 8). It is possible that IT as a provider of information, rather than as an administrator of drill or practice, could play a useful role in promoting second language learning. This may be an important research area in IT in second language acquisition.

However, it will be recalled that the 'T' in PLATO stands for 'teaching' and that the 'I' in CAI' (the American equivalent of CAL) stands for 'instruction'. British tradition, perhaps slightly smugly, has tended to prefer words about learning to words about instruction in such contexts. However, it would be unwise to assume that learning is always more important than teaching: some learners like to be taught, however progressive their facilitators may feel themselves to be; and accommodating different learning preferences may be a key element in research into instructional conditions and in the design of learning systems in the future (Skehan, 1989, p121).

The spread of micro-computers (1980 - 1990)

It was not until 1976 that the first Apple micro-computer was to emerge from a garage in California. The well-known IBM Personal Computer (PC) was introduced in 1984. The use of computers spread rapidly into industry and commerce, and later, more slowly, into the classroom.

These developments gave a new lease of life to CALL. A cottage industry sprung up of computer enthusiasts among language teachers and teacher trainers, developing ideas and exchanging programs. A number of ingenious ideas were introduced by Tim Johns of Birmingham University and his colleagues. Probably the best known of these is text manipulation, a well known and popular form of which is *Storyboard*.

A text about eighteen lines long is stored in the computer. It could be any sort of text in the target language - an excerpt from a novel, a newspaper report, the lyrics of a pop song. The teacher herself chooses the texts from which the students will choose, and types them in with a special authoring program.

The class begins. Imagine a group of three students around a computer. From a menu of options, they choose which text to work with, and can look at it for a few seconds before beginning. Then all the letters in the words are replaced with dots, but the punctuation is kept, thus:

...., ..., ...:

The group's task is to reconstitute the text, to rebuild it one word at a time like a mosaic. They do this by typing in single words. If they guess or remember a word correctly, the word is displayed on the screen at all the places it appears in the text. If they guess wrongly, a message appears: 'Hard luck. Try again.'

Gradually, the group put the text together again, like Humpty Dumpty. They may use the pattern of dots, their memory of the original text, their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, their powers of deduction, their knowledge of the world, etc. Meaning is important as well as grammar. Some groups find it a gratifying collaborative experience, though the student at the keyboard sometimes dominates the interactions.

A range of other text manipulation exercises offer similar tasks, such as rediscovering every seventh word (*Cloze*), or putting the lines of a shuffled text back in the right order (*Jumbler*). All these exercises have as their aim the putting together of a mangled or otherwise degraded text. In addition, they offer learners immediate feedback, help facilities if they get stuck, and a considerable degree of control over their learning situation. From the teacher's point of view, they are easy to use, since authoring or typing in the basis texts takes only a few minutes; and the texts can be chosen to fit in with the rest of the teaching-learning sequence.

But how useful are such exercises for promoting language learning? One possible disadvantage of text manipulation exercises, ingenious though they are, is that they are essentially convergent and inward-looking. Rather than encouraging learners to explore and experiment with the target language, they ask them to find 'the right answer', in a way rather like the old teacher's trick of 'tell me what word I'm thinking of'. The learner is trying to discover something already determined, and not using language creatively, to express new meanings (Widdowson, 1983).

Up to a point, then, both classical drill and practice CALL and supposedly progressive text manipulation, which between them account for a large proportion of present-day CALL software, are essentially machine- or teacher-centred. Where Stevick asks of language teaching techniques that they should 'reduce reflectivity' and 'increase productivity at as many levels as possible', that is 'generating language in which one has exercised choice', (Stevick, 1976, p131), text manipulation reveals itself as a form of practice in which (except for one or two special versions) there is only one correct choice at each decision point.

Back to high-tech (1990 - present day)

The first years of the nineties have shown a proliferation of development projects using multimedia, some of them still based on drill and practice. Multimedia techniques may have a lot to offer language learning, but in no way do they constitute a theory of either second language acquisition or second language teaching. They attract by their electronic wizardry and their attractive formats. But where is the learning?

Some principles for the use of IT in second language acquisition

From the above brief review of landmarks in CALL development, it is possible to identify three central principles for using IT in language learning:

- need for scepticism;
- centrality of the personal;
- modest aims.

These principles will be discussed in turn:

SCIENTISM AND GULLIBILITY

In the field of information technology in language learning, as in some areas of applied linguistics, it is necessary to keep one's wits about one, and to beware of mumbo jumbo. One should not trust a man simply because he is wearing a white coat, or because he quotes a lot of research; and it is wise to examine and evaluate the research, and to test claims about new methods of teaching, against common sense and practical experience. In the history of CALL, it is possibly scientism and gullibility that have been, and that remain, the main enemies of insight or progress. It is now a quarter of a century since the theory of operant conditioning in first language acquisition was convincingly refuted by Chomsky (1979). Yet operant conditioning is still alive today, not only in prisons and psychiatric institutions, but also in language laboratories and computer classrooms.

CENTRALITY OF THE PERSONAL

The claim was made in the introduction that language exists and functions in large part as a vehicle for interpersonal relations. In some ways, the communicative approach seems to take this on board. However, it is not always easy to use IT for communicative practice, though Hardisty and Windeatt (1989) suggest a number of ways of using CALL for information transfer and information and opinion gap tasks. The discussion that follows concentrates on the dispensability of the teacher, and learners' and teachers' needs.

IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN INVOLVEMENT

The key point here is the maintenance of human agency. Language learning without the involvement of other humans apart from the learner is intrinsically limited. It simply is not true that natural language processing or other computer techniques are available which are capable of filling this gap by either 'conversing' or 'tutoring' in open-ended, unpredictable, life-like language.

In fact, teachers, *conseillères à l'apprentissage* (Esch, 1992) and helpers really are very useful for stimulating language capacity (Widdowson, 1983) or language learning, as are fellow students or other speakers of the target language. Nor do these teachers or helpers need to be in the same room, or even awake at the same time. Communication all over the world is possible by phone and e-mail; and computer conferencing even makes it possible to ask a question now that will be answered later. What does seem to be at the centre of language learning is interpersonal contact and human relationships. It is in synergy with human capacities that IT becomes most useful.

A related aspect of this theme is learner needs, and the arguments for developing learner autonomy. These are important matters, though not developed here. Perhaps also worthy of note, however, are the needs of teachers. Curran (1976) talks of the stage in the development of the language learner when she realises that the teacher is 'sick to teach', that is she has an overpowering need to teach. Some teachers, in other words, have a strong need to teach in order to fulfil themselves, to achieve balance and harmony in their lives. We may talk about 'learner needs', but teachers have needs as well. In a humane approach to IT in language education, might not these needs also be recognised, accommodated and valued?

INSTRUCTION, TRANSMISSION OR FACILITATION?

As the brief history of CALL reveals, the use of IT in language learning has become progressively more complex and sophisticated. Computers can handle increasingly lengthy texts in greater numbers, transmit them across great distances, present them in the form of text, sound, or still or moving visuals. Caught up in the notion of progress, teachers have strained themselves to incorporate the new technologies into their teaching.

This is all very well. But is it not also the case that the most powerful computer, or set of computers, available to the language learner is the one inside her head? Furthermore, work on universal grammar suggests that natural selection has designed us for language learning, and that all normal children are born with considerable knowledge of certain features shared by all world languages (Chomsky, 1989).

How much this inborn knowledge is available for second language acquisition is not yet clear (White, 1989). Yet even the possibility that it might be available, together with the evident linguistic capacities of human learners, might incline us away from using computers for instruction.

Perhaps more useful roles for IT in language learning are those of communication, transmission and presentation. Rather than attempting to use IT to simulate or supplant cognitive processes in teachers and learners, it might be worth concentrating the use of IT for transmission and distribution of linguistic information, as communication devices rather than as a means of instruction. The role of facilitation would be central from this viewpoint. Computers could give users, whether learners or teachers, opportunities for browsing and exploration. They could continue to give them access to ready-made writing tools, such as wordprocessors with spellcheck, grammar check and thesaurus; to concordancers and databases, whether on-line or compactly stored on CD-ROM and so on.

Conclusion

The preceding paragraphs have not been intended as a critique of IT as such, but rather as a critique both of its misuse and of the deception and confusion that surround its promotion. Furthermore, a preference for using IT for presentation rather than instruction should not hide the fact that instruction by computers may be particularly productive in certain language learning situations, for example those where learners themselves control the learning process. For example, one could imagine the use of macrogeneration techniques to produce individualised grammar drills to order, on a dial-a-drill basis, and thus to emancipate the learner from predetermined practice. Finally, to see computers and human beings as being in opposition to, or competition with, each other may be to fail to recognise that it is perhaps in synergy with human capacities that IT can best fulfil its potential.

3. Hypermedia and cognitive tools

TERRY MAYES

The overall purpose of this paper is to discuss the way in which computers are currently being used to support learning. In particular, some of the assumptions underlying the development of hypermedia for learning will be examined, and a rather different perspective offered - that which has become known as constructivism. This perspective will be justified by referring to some previous and current work in the area of learning from computers, and by presenting a view of learning grounded in cognitive psychology.

Answers will be sought to the following questions:

- What are hypermedia and multimedia good for?
- Why do the authors of hypermedia courseware learn more than the students who use it?
- What are the right conditions for effective learning?
- What are cognitive tools?
- Where should we direct our development effort in the future?

Hypermedia for learning: the background

Hypertext represented a very significant step forward in the development of the use of computers in education. Traditional CAL, with frames programmed in some awkward authoring language, was still seen as labouring under the dead-hand of programmed instruction. The teaching machine era of the sixties and early seventies was widely seen as having failed, although the principles of programmed instruction took some of the blame that should have been directed at the crude attempts to apply it to education. Meanwhile, in the psychology of learning, the emphasis moved decisively away from a study of the acquisition of knowledge or skill towards the nature of the competence and expertise that learning produces (Glaser, 1990). The study of competence in complex performance produced significant advances in our understanding of the organisation of memory, in the nature of information processing for problem solving, and in the qualitative and quantitative changes that result from extended practice and in the development of expertise. Much of this was then reflected in the attempts to derive knowledge-based approaches to tutoring. Throughout this period, though, a kind of Piagetian sub-plot inspired much educational theory, and continued to place learning processes at the top of the agenda. This influence can be seen in the LOGO movement, and more generally in the focus on problem solving as the main paradigm for the development of CAL (see e.g. O'Shea and Self, 1982).

Hypertext and its derivatives in multimedia seem to owe little to any of this background. Hypertext was not initially seen by many of its proponents as a particularly suitable vehicle for learning. It soon became apparent, however, that the power of information access provided by such systems offered opportunities for the design of reactive learning environments. Making a virtue out of the lack of student modelling provided in such systems, many saw exploratory or discovery learning not only as a welcome relief from the apparent difficulties of designing systems capable of genuine dialogue with learners, but more importantly as the paradigm offering most promise for active learning. In hypermedia, we now have systems offering complete learner control, with a high degree of interactivity through direct manipulation interfaces to large databases of multimedia teaching materials. It is worth noting in passing that it has sometimes been argued that the hypermedia paradigm is particularly suitable for learning because it somehow reflects the apparently associative nature of human thought. This argument, like some others promoted in support of learning from hypermedia, is probably spurious.

What is the case for designing hypermedia systems for learning? Essentially, there are two kinds of reasons: those which depend on the 'hyper' features, and those which are due to the use of multimedia.

The case for the 'hyper' idea

The case for the 'hyper' idea can be presented as follows:

- The hypertext idea itself, as Conklin (1987) has pointed out, conveyed the important notion that computers could help to augment human cognition. Hypertext uses the computer in the role of a tool for supporting various kinds of cognitive actions. Thus, at a general level, it helps to shift the focus away from the idea that a computer, because it seems to consist mainly of a screen, is simply a device for presenting information.

- The idea also conveys the concept of 'just-in-time' information access. It is the learner who is in the best position to judge what information he or she needs next. Hypermedia gives the learner control to access information that is most relevant to the particular learning need of the moment. It therefore contrasts with most previous forms of CAL, which have presented information in an 'expository' mode.

- Hypermedia also provides a high degree of interactivity. Interactive learning is widely assumed to be effective because active learning produces more effective learning outcomes.

- Developing the idea of learner control, it was soon appreciated that computers could also provide environments in which discovery learning could occur. Learning-by-browsing emphasised this paradigm, and browsing was seen as the natural mode of navigating through hypermedia.

One system that exemplifies CAL based on the provision of specific guidance tools built on top of a hypertext network is *Hitchhikers' Guide* (Hammond and Allinson, 1988). The principle espoused here is that of extending and tailoring basic hypertext facilities, not only with the fairly standard aids to access, such as browsers, but also with tools that help the user to explore the material conceptually, such as guided tours, indexes, and quizzes. Allinson and Hammond (1989) have referred to such a system as a Learning Support Environment (LSE).

There are problems with each of the above arguments which raise questions about the validity of the case for hypermedia. First, the fact that hypertext provides a cognitive tool does not necessarily imply that it will be effective in support of the process of learning. Secondly, as Hammond (1992) has pointed out, the learner is not always going to choose what information to see next in a way that will lead to effective learning. Unguided choice may be as inefficient as no choice. Thirdly, there are problems with the simple idea that interactivity is a necessary attribute of effective learning from computers. Just what it is about interactivity that succeeds in promoting better learning has rarely been questioned. Indeed, some learning software is described as 'interactive' simply because the learner has to press the space bar to proceed to the next screen of information. It is evident that a more critical analysis of interactivity is needed before we can be confident of identifying the essential feature(s) which lead to effective learning. Some authors have referred to 'engagement' as the necessary factor. However, that shifts the locus of effect onto the cognitive level, and does not necessarily help us to design environments in which engagement is likely to occur. Finally, questions can be raised about discovery learning through browsing. Unless the browsing can be motivated by seeking answers to questions, or by some kind of problem solving, then it may only support a shallow learning experience. An important research question could be built around the observation of enjoyment that readers of magazines experience in browsing. A very major publishing industry is based on this almost universal feature of human reading. Readers seem to enjoy the experience of browsing in a domain in which they are already knowledgeable. It is not clear that browsing in an **unfamiliar** domain occurs at all as a primary learning strategy. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that browsing becomes enjoyable only when a certain level of familiarity, or to put it in cognitive terms, when schemata have become sufficiently well developed for browsing to represent a process of 'tuning' (Norman, 1982). An important, and still unanswered, research question concerns this aspect of what learning 'feels like'.

There are also the disadvantages of the 'hyper' idea described by Conklin (1987). That is, the feeling of disorientation engendered by trying to navigate in a non-linear information space; and the cognitive overhead of being required continually to make choices. Finally, a serious drawback to hypermedia is the complexity involved in its authoring.

The case for the multimedia idea

Turning now to the characteristic that has led, above all, to the enthusiasm for using computers in support of learning, we must consider the case for multimedia. Taking advantage of the graphic and sound capabilities of modern desktop machines, using processing power to generate simulated microworlds, and integrating some of the potential of digital video, now allows the creation and delivery of vivid interactive courseware. One well-known example of this is *Palenque* (Wilson, 1988). *Palenque* is a discovery learning system in which the learner is able to explore all the paths of an ancient Mayan site. As the user travels through the site a multimedia database in the form of a museum provides moving video, stills, audio and text about the rainforest, the Mayans, maps of the area, and glyph writing. What characterises *Palenque* is the variety of methods and media the user is offered for accessing the knowledge. The components are: video overviews; surrogate or virtual navigation; a multimedia database; characters as experts and guides; simulated tools; and games. The interface in *Palenque* employs visual menus and dynamic icons, spatial and thematic navigation, and a simple input device. The virtual travel around the *Palenque* site can be regarded as a main menu for an exploratory mode in which various options and subprograms are distributed spatially at meaningful locations. Icons represent such options as branch points in travel, available pans and information zooms, and narrations.

It seems self-evident that multimedia will support more effective learning, but as with our examination of the 'hyper' idea, a closer consideration of the arguments and evidence begins to raise some doubts. The combination of media in displays, particularly the 'high resolution, colour, full-motion video-with-speech' variety carries with it a vividness that cannot be questioned. However, Taylor and Thomson (1982) attempted to pin this down in a comprehensive review of work on the 'vividness' effect. Their conclusions were surprising:

> *Everyone knows that vividly presented information is impactful and persuasive... There is one problem with this self-evident proposition. The available evidence suggests that it is not true.*

The research failed to show that concrete descriptions have any greater impact than dull ones; that pictorially illustrated information is more effective than that which is not illustrated; or that video-taped information has more impact than oral or written. One can react to this negative conclusion by rejecting the validity of the research. The authors, however, make the point that vividness can never be simply a function of the presentation. The impact will always depend on an interaction with user characteristics. There is no evidence, for example, that a more 'vivid' experience is a more memorable one, if by 'vivid' we mean some combination of characteristics of the presentation. Vividness is entirely 'in the eye of the beholder'.

The fundamental point here is that as learners we are not easily enticed by surface aspects of information, and the attempt to use computers to somehow make the learning experience more attractive or more palatable is doomed to failure. Information that is poured into the learner's head through the 'Nurnberg Funnel' (Carroll, 1990) is only likely to be better learned as a consequence of being presented through multimedia if it is thereby better understood. Hypermedia or multimedia will therefore be successful to the extent that they promote better understanding.

The *StrathTutor* experience

From 1986, my colleagues and I worked with a hypermedia system that we called *StrathTutor*. This has been fully described elsewhere (Mayes et al, 1988) but a short description will summarise its main features.

StrathTutor consists of frames of text and graphics on some topic which a learner explores. In *StrathTutor* links between frames are automatically computed on the basis of the author's identification of a set of up to 60 underlying concepts that will be represented in the topic. On any individual frame the author will have identified those particular concepts ('attributes') that are present in that frame. The system computes the 'relatedness' of all remaining unseen frames to the current frame ('frame' is arbitrarily set at the size of a single screen or part of a screen). The learner can choose to navigate by accepting the 'related' frames offered by the system, or can proceed to access named frames. Details of the way in which *StrathTutor* achieves this computation are given in Kibby and Mayes (1989). There is a traditional hypertext feature where the learner can click on part of a frame to bring up a window presenting explanatory material. Nevertheless, a much more important feature of this system is the opportunity it offers learners to try out hypotheses about the underlying concepts. In a sense the learner is invited to try to understand why the system is doing what it is: to work out the meaning of the underlying attributes and the relationships between them. A learner can 'interrogate' the system by designating a combination of attributes that may be beginning to seem meaningful, and the system will respond by giving the learner a 'guided tour' of all frames that are coded with that particular subset of attributes.

The main instructional approach embodied in *StrathTutor* is one of learning by challenge. Despite its conventional frame-based appearance it can actually be seen as a problem generating system. The *StrathTutor* 'quiz' invites the learner to play a kind of game, in which he or she tries to identify the areas across the two frames which have maximum overlap in terms of the underlying concepts (attributes). Here the learners are pitting themselves against the author who coded the frames in the first place. The learners are trying to solve an intellectual puzzle by creating for themselves a view of the underlying conceptual space.

Thus, as originally conceived, *StrathTutor* provided the following features:

- automatic links;
- exploration through a variety of browsing techniques;
- easy authoring;
- 'games' features for motivation.

STRATHTUTOR AS UNDERSTOOD IN 1993

Now, our perspective on *StrathTutor* is rather different. The main shift in emphasis has occurred as a result of observing *StrathTutor* being used, in a variety of different contexts. This has led us to the view that the users of *StrathTutor* who benefit most, those who experience the deep learning experience, are not the students but the authors. Time and again this observation has been emphasised. Finally we accepted the obvious point. In order for an author to code the subject matter at the level *StrathTutor* required, they were attempting a task that it was not possible to achieve satisfactorily without reaching a deep understanding of the material. We had created an effective learning tool, but it was most effectively used not by trying to double-guess the coding that someone else had put on the material, but by doing so directly. Simply by changing roles - by placing the learner in the role of author - we realised that we had created a cognitive tool for learning.

Cognitive tools for learning

A cognitive tool for learning is simply a device, or technique, for focusing the learner's analytical processes. In the context used here, a cognitive tool provides computer support for a task, the explicit purpose of which is to lead to active and durable learning of the information manipulated or organised in some way by the task. The primary task is not learning per se. Rather, learning is an inescapable by-product of comprehension. The point of the cognitive tool is to make it possible for the learner to acquire a deeper understanding of the material. Then learning takes care of itself. Mayes (1992) gives an account of cognitive tools derived from cognitive psychology. The experimental underpinning of this is provided by the work on levels of processing (Craik and Lockhart, 1975) and the enactment effect (Cohen, 1981). But it is a long-established theme in the study of human cognition that learning flows from understanding, and understanding flows from action and problem solving (Bartlett, 1932).

A recent book by Kommers, Jonassen and Mayes (1992) draws together many examples of cognitive tools for learning. The techniques range from requiring learners to engage in concept mapping based on constructing semantic nets (e.g. SemNet) through to simple attempts to represent the domain as a series of rules by asking students to use a simple expert-system shell (Trollip et al, 1992). In each of these examples the students can be placed in some sense in the role of teacher, by being required to structure their developing understanding for someone else to view. This capitalises on the oft-quoted observation that the best way to learn something is to teach it. It strongly suggests that the most promising way in which computers can aid learning is for us to stop thinking of authoring as a task for subject matter experts, and to start putting authoring tools into the hands of students. It is consistent with a view of learning that can be characterised as constructivist (Duffy et al, 1993). Put simply, this approach rests on the basic assumption that understanding has to be constructed by the learner. There is a strong tradition of constructivism in higher education. That is the basis for the student essay, or laboratory report. For a while computers-as-presentation-devices have distracted us from the constructivist approach. It is time to return to basics.

Learning from computers: a constructivist manifesto

In summary, the following points emphasise the constructivist argument underlying this paper:

- Hypermedia/multimedia learning systems will be effective in so far as they support the learner in the performance of knowledge construction tasks. The influence of the features usually emphasised - learner control, interactivity, browsing, vividness of presentation - will be secondary, and probably will have only marginal benefit for learning.

- 'Interactivity' by itself is not enough. The interaction must be at the level of meaning, whereby the learner seeks answers to new questions, arranges the material into new structures, or performs other manipulations which succeed in raising the level of comprehension. Deep learning will then follow naturally.

- We already have many computer-based tools which can serve to support learners in constructing knowledge. Some of these are authoring tools. Since our observations lead us to conclude that authors do the best learning, the obvious step is to shift our perspective and regard them as cognitive tools for learning.

- There are many other possible computer-based cognitive tools for learning. A kind that has not been discussed here is based on computer-mediated communication. Computers now provide powerful opportunities for learners to support each other. This is consistent with the constructivist approach of student-as-teacher. Learner-learner communication has become an important theme in our work on the ISLE (Intensely Supportive Learning Environment) Project at Heriot-Watt.

- A key to the design of cognitive tools for learning lies in our understanding of why some learning tasks are pleasurable, while others are aversive. This remains a fundamental challenge for future research.

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2

Engaging the process

Organising a self-access system is about responding to learners' needs, which presupposes communicating with learners. In this section, three papers approach the problem of initiating the communication process from different angles.

Leslie Dickinson introduces the fundamental idea that learning efficiently does not come 'naturally', perhaps even more so when it comes to learning languages. Opening a self-access system is easy. Ensuring that learners use it effectively, learn and use languages is another matter. We need to learn how to learn, and to do this we need to be prepared to exercise a certain degree of autonomy**.*

The other fundamental idea developed here by Leslie Dickinson in his critical discussion of learning strategies is that 'engaging the process' might be at least as important on the teacher's side as on the learners' side.

The other two papers in the section follow from Leslie Dickinson's paper.

From the concept of learner preparation, Edith Esch takes us to the wider idea of 'learner support'. In doing so, she shifts from the process view of learning supported by Dickinson into an interactional view. Four golden rules and practical hints on 'means to make people talk' are given.

The dialogue between Anny King and Peter Forbes brings in two additional dimensions. The first one relates to the content of the conversation. Self-access, whether we are in higher education, further education or industry, has to do with creating a context for learning. It is necessary to develop a framework for a language learning culture, to state - re-state if necessary - objectives and to engage in a dialogue with learners.

The second dimension is brought about by the format of the dialogue itself. It is an example of interaction between industry and higher education, where two

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* See Philip Riley's paper in Section 1.

** For definitions see Little D, *Learner autonomy* (Authentik, 1991).

participants from very different backgrounds and operating in very different types of organisations gain from each other's experience through discourse instead of reinforcing each others' pre-conceived ideas.

Suggested readers' guide

This section on engaging the process of self-access language learning raises many interesting issues and discussion points.

Access point

For teachers/advisers under presssure of time, chapter 5 - focusing on learner support - is one of the recommended access points. The other access point is chapter 7 in Section 3.

Suggested follow-up

- *Teachers/advisers*

  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues

  For practical examples illustrating the issues discussed in this section you may want to move on to Section 4 (ch 10) and Section 3 (ch 9).

  under pressure of time and needing to take action

  Read also chapter 7 in Section 3 before continuing to chapter 4 in this section and Section 4 for further discussion of relevant ideas. Practical examples are given in Section 6 (ch 17 and 20).

- *Policy makers*

  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues

  In industry: chapters 6, 4 and 5 will be of particular interest.

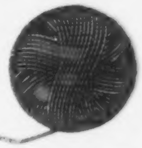
  under pressure of time and needing to take action

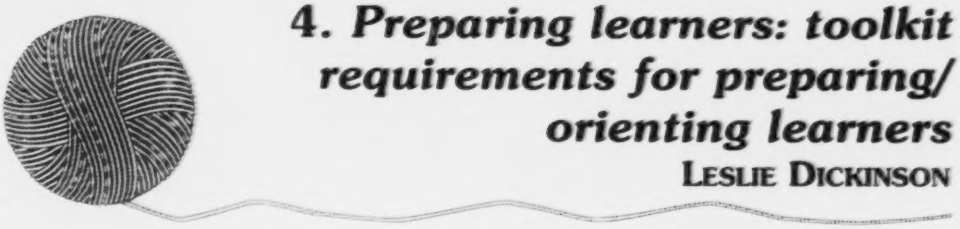
  See chapters 4 and 5 in this section and chapter 7 in Section 3 for further discussion of relevant issues, then carry on to practical examples in Section 6 (ch 16).
  In industry: chapter 5 will be of particular interest.

- *Librarians*

  under pressure of time and needing to take action

  For further discussion of relevant issues see Sections 3 and 5.





4. Preparing learners: toolkit requirements for preparing/ orienting learners

LESLIE DICKINSON

There are many possible reasons for learners involving themselves in self-instruction either in a self-access centre or in some other learning context, and I have listed and discussed some of them in Dickinson (1987). Here, I am concerned with self-access as a means of practising and implementing learner autonomy, and so my discussion of the requirements of preparing learners to operate in self-access is essentially a discussion of the requirements of preparing learners for learner autonomy. This is not as restrictive as it might appear, since all learners working in a self-access context are likely to be working autonomously for at least part of the time on some objectives, and in preparing learners for learner autonomy one is also giving them the tools to be more effective learners whether they work in an evidently autonomous mode or in a teacher-led classroom.

Learner autonomy

For a long time I thought of autonomy in terms of the physical conditions within which the learner was operating; thus, a self-access centre was a learning context in which the learner might be autonomous. However, it is also the case that learners might operate autonomously in a teacher-led classroom; in addition, proponents of autonomy frequently protest that autonomy does not entail isolation, so what are the essential characteristics of autonomy?

The most satisfactory characterisation I can produce is that successful learning autonomy is a combination of attitudes to learning and learning skills; it appears to have the following elements:

- first, there is **motivation** to learn the target language (TL) since autonomy must sensibly be distinguished from lack of interest in the TL and/or disengagement from learning it;

- second, there is a favourable **attitude towards independence in learning**; that is, an autonomous learner is one who takes an independent stance towards his or her learning. There is some evidence that one quality of successful learners is learning independence (see, for example, the review of research in subjects other than language learning by Wang and Peverley, 1986). However, it is not sufficient for a learner to have an independent stance; the learner must also have **learning skills**.

Successful learners are able to:

- state and follow up their own purposes (possibly in addition to the teacher's or those of the materials if they are following a course) - that is, they are able to formulate their own learning objectives;
- identify what is being taught in the materials they select, or by the teacher if they are (also) following a course;

- select and implement appropriate learning strategies;
- monitor and evaluate their own use of learning strategies;
- monitor their own learning.

This list gives us a possible set of objectives for preparing learners for effective work in self-access. Let us examine each of the items in the list in more detail.

MOTIVATION

Much of the discussion on motivation in language learning over the past ten years or so has been dominated by Gardner's conceptualisation of motivation in terms of the learner's attitudes, especially his attitude to the target language and the speakers of the language (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1983, 1985). Such a view of motivation is clearly relevant to predicting the willingness of a learner to make sustained use of self-access resources, but it is not particularly productive in the context of learner preparation since there is not a great deal that a teacher can do to change students' attitudes, at least in the short term.

Motivation, however, is broader that one might suppose from reading only Gardner. Attribution theory sees motivation as determined by the individual's perception of the causes of success or failure. Those who believe that their personal efforts influence their learning and achievement are more likely to learn than those who believe that learning depends on teachers or other factors such as luck or the difficulty level of the task. Wang and Palincsar (1989, p76) comment that research in learning in general education indicates a link between the amount of effort and the degree of persistence of students in a learning activity and (a) their expectations regarding success and failure, (b) the value they give to the activity, and (c) the extent to which they believe that their own strategic effort influences outcomes. They add that 'a basic premise of research in this area is that learning success enhances students' self-perception of competence only if they perceive or accept responsibility for success. Performance improves when they accept responsibility for their success, and understand that effort on their part can overcome failure'. Thus, an aspect of preparation, particularly for those learners who perceive success or failure in language learning as being beyond their control, should aim to develop the students' perceptions of their ability as learners, explaining the causes of learning success and failures and emphasising the extent to which they are in control of learning situations.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE IN LEARNING

This is touched upon in the discussion of motivation above. However, in terms of preparation, I have argued for many years (see, for example, Dickinson and Carver, 1985) that the most effective way of developing favourable attitudes towards independence in learning is to give learners successful experiences of independent learning in contexts such as self-access centres. The likelihood of the success of the experience can be increased by the teacher working closely with learners initially helping them to specify very clear objectives, in helping them to select appropriate materials to meet those objectives, and by the teacher ensuring that the learners are well prepared to use the materials - which is the subject of the next sections.

Skills of successful learners

The five skills of successful learners listed above are an attempt to give substance to the slogan 'learning how to learn'. An important part of the preparation of learners for self-access work is helping them to learn how to learn.

SKILLS CONCERNED WITH THE SPECIFICATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES

Objectives are important if an independent learner is to be purposeful. Learners can be offered support in this area through devices such as learner contracts, perhaps in association with tutorial work with the teacher on identifying objectives, and on specifying objectives in terms of learning needs.

A major function of the teacher's responsibilities in a conventional language class is to provide purpose and structure in the students' learning, and a crucial question for those of us concerned with self-access is how these are provided in an autonomous mode. One of the main differences between learning in a teacher-led class and learning in an autonomous mode is the means through which the learning is structured. All language learners need to feel that their learning is purposeful to be successful. Purposefulness is, at least in part, dependent on the structuring of the learning. The identification of relevant objectives, their incorporation into a realistic learning programme, the decision on what materials to use, over what period, and with what intensity, and a clear idea of how the learning is to be assessed, are all of crucial importance in efficient learning. The teacher in a conventional class structures the learner's work; the autonomous learner must provide the necessary structure for himself. Learners who have no clear idea of their objectives, who are wandering from one piece of material to another with no clear idea of where they are progressing, or what they want to achieve, very quickly get dispirited and are likely to give up their attempts at language learning.

Purpose is provided in student's learning particularly through the selection of goals and objectives. In addition, assessment for the purpose of discovering whether these objectives have been achieved is closely related to purpose. There are several implications for autonomous learning arising from this. Learners attempting to work autonomously, or being prepared for autonomy require:

- ways of defining needs;
- ways of identifying and prioritising objectives;
- ways of discovering their starting/entry point;
- ways of checking whether - and to what degree - they have achieved target objectives.

The need for structure in the work of autonomous learners has several implications for the preparation of learners for this mode. In order to achieve this structuring, the learner - either through his own resources or with help from a person or some supporting instrument - needs at least to be able to:

- select material which match the objectives;
- decide on the order in which the objectives should be tackled;
- decide on organisational matters like how intensely to work, when, etc;
- obtain language input, models, explanations, etc;
- monitor responses and assess the achievement of objectives and to decide when to move on to the next objective, whether to return to the current one and so on.

One way of ensuring that these are all dealt with is by building such decisions into the materials - either specially prepared or commercially available materials. However, few self-access centres are stocked with materials specially designed for self-access use. The materials in most centres are, inevitably, language courses, extracts from courses or extension materials which are designed for conventional classrooms with the assumption that they would be teacher-directed.

The alternative is to provide some form of initial support for learners as part of the preparation until they are able to make these decisions for themselves. The suggestions which follow are of such devices as simple needs analyses, and contracts; they are all taken from my book, *Self-instruction in language learning* (Dickinson, 1987), but none are original to me.

Edith Harding Esch (1982, and reprinted in Dickinson, 1987) has developed a very useful and simple device for guiding learners to think about their needs and objectives and how they are going to achieve them. The system can be used independently by consultation between the learner and a helper who can advise on materials and activities.

Specifying broad needs is relatively easy for learners but the identification of more detailed objectives arising from the needs is much more difficult. McCafferty proposes the performance chart as a solution to this difficulty. His example of a performance chart, which is illustrated in Dickinson (1987, pp52-53), has nine skill areas relevant to virtual native speaker competence - and nine skill areas relevant to administrators. The nine skill areas consist of three aspects of the general reading skill, three aspects of the writing skill and three aspects of the oral skills of listening and speaking. Each of the 81 resulting boxes contains a description of the criterial behaviour for the skill at that level. The choice to work on a particular skill level implies that the objectives at the previous levels have already been mastered. The performance chart - once it has been designed - provides a simple way of relating needs to goals.

Finally, learner contracts are useful for helping learners to give structure to their work. Contracts may be between a learner and a tutor at an early stage in preparation for autonomy, or later they may represent an agreement the learner makes with himself. A contract form I have used, and which is illustrated in Dickinson (1987), is divided into seven columns. The first relates to learning objectives. These might be identified by individuals after a group discussion about possibilities; (indeed all the substantial content of the form can be identified in this way). The second column asks for actual activities, and the third asks for thought about materials that could be used for the activity. The fourth column is for dates for completion of the work. The fifth column asks the learner to consider how he will assess his learning - how he will demonstrate that the objectives have been achieved. Next is a column for tutor's initials which is relevant only where the contract has been-between the learner and a tutor, and so the tutor needs to agree the contents. The final column asks for the actual date of completion of the work, and is intended to act as a check for the learner on the accuracy of the estimate of time to be taken.

SELECT AND IMPLEMENT APPROPRIATE LEARNING STRATEGIES

There has been considerable interest in the concept of 'learning strategies' in language learning over the past ten years or so and there has been a flurry of books and papers on the subject (I mention a few of the more relevant ones below). It is common now to divide learning strategies into three categories - cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social/affective strategies.

Cognitive strategies are directly involved in language learning so they involve specific, conscious ways of tackling learning tasks. They are, in effect, learning techniques which learners select and apply to learning tasks. For example, a learner who needs to learn a list of words in the foreign language might try to do so by reading through them repeatedly, and then try to recall the list without reading the words. This is the (cognitive) strategy of repetition. Another learner might associate each word in the list with an object in the room in which she is studying. She then recalls the list by looking at the objects and remembering the words 'in them'. Later, she may recall those objects in her room and at the same time remember the word associated with each object. This is a more elaborate cognitive strategy.

However, a learning task involves more than the simple application of a cognitive strategy. The learner must first ensure that she knows what the task requires her to do, and then she must select the appropriate cognitive strategy for doing it. These decisions are made through a series of mental operations which are carried out by using higher level strategies called metacognitive strategies. Some educational psycholinguists distinguish between cognitive and metacognitive strategies by using an analogy with the organisation of business. Metacognition (the application of metacognitive strategies) is called the executive, because these strategies are used to manage or control the learning process as we can see in the analysis of a learning task which follows.

First, the learning task has to be identified, possibly by the learner asking herself questions like:

- What is the task?
- What kind of task is it?
- Have I done anything like this before?

It is only after the task has been identified that a cognitive strategy - to help directly in doing the task - can be selected. The chosen cognitive strategy is then used to undertake the learning task. Effective learners monitor the use of the strategy as they are working by checking that this is the best way of doing the task. Once the task is completed, they check that everything has indeed been done, and they make some kind of rough assessment on how well they have learned or understood.

In the process just described metacognitive strategies are used for the following operations:

- identification of the learning task;
- selecting the appropriate cognitive strategy;
- monitoring the use of the cognitive strategy;
- checking that the task is complete;
- self-assessment of the learning.

The third type of strategy is social or social mediation strategies. These involve interacting with other people; for example, co-operation - working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information etc, self-reinforcement - such as planning rewards for oneself for the completion of a task.

MONITOR AND EVALUATE THEIR OWN USE OF LEARNING STRATEGIES

There are several techniques which a learner might use for any particular learning task. Someone involved in perfecting pronunciation might try merely repeating the target sound, but then discover that as soon as the sound is used in a word, they cannot get it right; they may try repeating sentences; or they may spend a long time listening to the correct pronunciation, and repeating it silently to themselves. Some people find it useful to use a mirror to check that they have the correct lip positions and so on. If there is more than one technique for a particular learning task, then the learner has a choice, and has, potentially, to make a decision between the alternatives.

The point is that some techniques are more useful for one learner than for another, and learners have to be encouraged to find the best technique for themselves.

MONITOR THEIR OWN LEARNING

A very important aspect of being an active and independent learner, is your willingness to monitor your own learning; to check how well a piece of work was done, or how accurately a sentence was imitated and so on. A learner who is actively involved in her own learning is active in self-monitoring. Self-monitoring and self-assessment are discussed in detail in Dickinson (1987).

Learning strategies re-examined

Learning strategies form the central thrust of the conception of learner preparation given here, but before leaving this topic it is only fair to indicate some of the misgivings I have about the general area.

The lists of cognitive and metacognitive strategies which have been produced are potentially very useful in helping teachers further understand what may facilitate language learning. (See, for example, O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1989) or Skehan (1989).) However, the cognitive strategies in particular hold few surprises for language teachers since most of them have for a long time either been recommended by teachers or modelled by them. Those strategies which learners report using most are rather banal and disappointing. Skehan, for example, comments that:

> *The most frequently used strategies tend to be concerned with rote learning, and not transformation or engagement with the learning material, a disappointing finding in that evidence from cognitive psychology suggests that depth processing... is an important influence upon effective learning...* (p89)

There are a number of problems in this area, mainly concerned with what learning strategies are, that is, their definition. It is not clear from the research reports on learning strategies whether what is being discussed is an aspect of learning, with the implication that there are many other aspects, or whether the strategies students use in learning constitutes virtually the whole of the learning process. These are important questions since we need to know what we are talking about and what the range of possibilities is for learner training.

Strategies tend to be defined so broadly that it appears as if any engagement with the target language with the intention of learning the language constitutes strategy use. The definition of O'Malley et al illustrates this:

> *Mental processes that are activated in order to understand new information that is ambiguous or to learn or retain new information are referred to as learning strategies. The defining features of learning strategies are that they are conscious and they are intended to enhance comprehension, learning or retention. Listening comprehension strategies in second language acquisition. (Listening comprehension strategies in second language learning,* p422)

If it is the case that any engagement with the target language constitutes strategy use, then only those students who are entirely passive and make no engagement - either overtly or covertly - with the target language are non-users.

If this is the case, then two questions need to be answered. The first is, where do these learning strategies come from? And the second is the key question: what makes the difference between good and not so good learners, and what is the part strategy selection and use plays in this?

There seems to be four possible sources for the origins of the strategies:

- Strategy knowledge and use is a function of normal classroom instruction; i.e. that learners learn strategies from the modelling and explicit teaching of their language teachers and from their coursebooks. Nisbet and Shucksmith make the point as follows:

  The question is not Can teachers teach how to learn? They do; whether they intend it or not they are models for their pupils in the learning styles and strategies which the teachers use. Secondary school teachers commonly teach skills which are specific to their subjects, and which are implicit in those subjects; science teachers, for example, demonstrate hypothetic-deductive thinking, and English teachers encourage sensitivity to language and clear expression of ideas and feelings. (p10)

- Strategy knowledge and use is the product of general education, i.e. many strategies are generic and are transferred from other instructional areas, and perhaps carried forward from earlier educational experiences.

- Strategy knowledge and use is developed autonomously, i.e. learners' involvement with learning tasks inevitably requires strategies. If learners do not have strategies readily available, they may develop their own. These will sometimes be effective, sometimes ineffective. Experienced language learners presumably have collected an effective repertoire of strategies, some of which they will have developed for themselves.

- Strategies are learned from peers. Strategies being used by other learners may be adopted by a learner. Learners may swop strategies.

One conclusion arising from these possibilities is that the development of strategies and their use is largely the result of the normal classroom processes of language teaching, and that learning effectiveness can, and should be directly affected by teachers being more aware of the importance of helping their learners to develop autonomy. It may be that the most effective way of influencing language learning effectiveness is through developments in teacher preparation, so that teachers in regular classroom lessons should focus more on learning processes and strive to introduce a measure of independence in their learners. The problem of what distinguishes good and poor language learners remains. Since there is good research evidence that less effective learners as well as good learners have a range of learning strategies available, the major difference does not seem to be a lack of knowledge about strategies on the part of less good learners. Rather, it seems to be one of 'production deficiency'.

The term was coined by Flavell (1970) who was involved in research on children learning to read in their mother tongue. He used the term 'production deficiency' to label situations in which learners have relevant knowledge or strategies but where they do not use the knowledge or strategies unless prompted to do so. Though the original research was with children, this finding has been replicated in later research with adult students.

One solution seems to lie in giving 'informed' training to learners. Brown and her co-researchers compared learners who know what a strategy is for and how it helps in the relevant learning task (informed training) with those who know what it is for, but who have not been told how it helps (blind training). Those who had had informed training were more effective users of the strategy that those with blind training. However, learners who have had the opportunity to practise using the strategy and to monitor the effect (self-control) are likely to be the most efficient users of that strategy. Rubin (1990) gives an example from language learning:

> *An example of blind training would be if in teaching listening comprehension you ask students to discuss the ideas which the title of the story evokes, without naming the strategy. This guessing or prediction is an advance organiser, though the teacher doesn't name it. If you then told students they were going to learn about a strategy called advanced organiser and told them why it would be useful in listening, this would be informed training. Finally, if you provide students with opportunities to select the strategy to use for a particular task or text and discussed the rationale for their choice, this would be self-control training* (p277).

Programmes of preparation

I shall conclude this paper with brief descriptions of programmes for training learners in the use of learning strategies. The first, from Wang and Palincsar (1989), is designed for learners in any academic subject, whilst the remaining four are designed specifically for language learners.

WANG AND PALINCSAR (1989) (PP78-79)

The assessment stage
Teachers evaluate the cognitive strategies that their students currently employ in particular learning situations

The introduction stage
Learners are given explicit information on:

- what cognitive strategies they are going to learn;
- how they should employ the strategy;
- the context in which the strategy would be useful.

The guided practice and modelling stages
'Instruction and practice in cognitive strategies are most effective when they occur in the contexts in which the strategies are meant to be used. Thus teachers often use modelling or demonstration as part of the process of instruction in cognitive strategies.' (p78) A technique called 'expert scaffolding' is sometimes used. It has the following characteristics:

- the teacher supports students' attempts to use a cognitive strategy;
- the support is adjusted according to the learner's characteristics, the nature of the material and of the criterial tasks;
- the support is treated as temporary, and is removed as student confidence increases.

The independent application stage
Opportunities are provided for the independent application of cognitive strategies.

Wenden (1991) (p104)

- introduce the concept 'strategy';
- determine the strategies that learners use;
- demonstrate and name the target strategy;
- provide in-class practice;
- explore the significance of the strategy;
- practise in authentic settings;
- evaluate the outcome of practice sessions;
- provide critical review.

Ellis and Sinclair (1989)

Ellis and Sinclair suggest three phases for training:

- Students are introduced to language learning processes through discussions with the teacher, questionnaires about their learning approach, analysis of their learning needs and investigation of the learning resources available outside the immediate context of the language classroom.
- Students are provided with direct instruction and practice in learning strategies for particular language skills.
- Students take charge of their own learning through activities that help them to identify resources and plan realistically for continued language study as part of their overall schedule.

Oxford (1990): A model for strategy training (p203)

- Assess students' current learning strategies.
- Determine the learners' needs and the time available.
- Select strategies well.
- Consider integration of strategy training with the tasks, objectives and materials used in the regular training programme.
- Consider motivational issues - e.g. will you give good grades?
- Prepare materials and activities.
- Conduct completely informed training.
- Evaluate the strategy training.
- Revise.

GOAL - Leslie Dickinson (1992)

The procedure I have developed is called GOAL, for reasons which will be obvious. The system encourages learners to apply learning strategies to tasks that he or she is engaged in by offering a series of 'self questions' that the learners can ask as he engages with the task. I have adapted it here for use in a self-access centre.

The user refers to the checklist below whilst he is working on a unit of material. The checklist consists of a series of questions the user asks himself which are intended to encourage the use of metacognitive strategies. The procedure is intended to have built-in redundancy, in that as users become familiar with it (or with some other they may prefer) then the checklist is scrapped.

GOAL

Ask yourself these questions:

G=Goal	What are your language learning goals? i.e. what do you want to achieve over the next period (e.g. one month)? (The purpose is to get the user to articulate current learning goals and to relate to the overall plan or contract)
O=Objective	What are the immediate objectives of the task you are going to do? i.e. do you know what the declared objectives of the materials are? Do you have any additional objectives of your own which you wish to work on by using this task?
A=Act	What is the best way of doing the task? (The purpose is to get the user to consciously select a strategy - even if this is to be consciously aware of the strategy implied in the materials) Is there an alternative? i.e. keep on looking for something better
L=Look	Look at your learning. Did you learn what you set out to learn? If not, why not? Look at the way you did it. Did it work well, or is there a better way? Look at how hard you worked. Did you work hard or not very hard?

Preparation necessary to undertake these steps

The first two categories concerned with goals and objectives will have been introduced to learners through needs analysis and contracts. More specific support and preparation can be carried out through counselling. Preparation for ACT and LOOK might involve (or select from) a number of things: questionnaires on learning styles, questionnaires on language use, the good and bad learning experience activity and group discussions (see below for references to these).

In order to make decisions on the best way of doing a task (i.e. selection of strategy) and in order to evaluate the use of the strategy, a learner has to have some notion of her own preferred learning style. Many learners have no awareness whatever of their preferred learning styles, and some will not even be aware that there are alternative styles. Consequently, an important priority for preparation is to raise awareness of learning style. Three suggestions for doing this are:

- Get learners to complete a learning style questionnaire. There is an example in Ellis and Sinclair's book *Learning to learn English*: 'What kind of learner are you?'.
- Get learners to complete a questionnaire on strategy use. There is an example in Oxford's book *Language learning strategies*: 'The strategy inventory for language learning'.

- Get learners (in groups) to do the activity 'Good and bad learning experiences'. There is a description of one form of this activity in Dickinson (1992; pp47-49) (or see Oxford (1989b)). In each case after the activities, it is suggested that learners meet in groups to discuss their responses. This, of course, entails that these activities are done with groups of learners rather than on an individual basis.

Learners can be helped to develop additional learning strategies in two ways. Firstly, through direct strategy training - in which the teacher teaches a strategy for tackling a specific learning task; and by discussions on strategies among groups of learners. Direct strategy training might be used, for example, to help learners to develop reading or listening comprehension skills by teaching them to review what they know of the topic of the passage before reading it or listening to it, and by identifying questions they might want answered from the text. The findings of strategy training research suggest that learners would benefit from informed training, that is where they are told the name of the strategy, what it is for and how it is likely to help.

In addition - or alternatively - learners could be asked to share their preferred learning strategies in groups. After having done a language task, individual learners could be asked to describe the strategy they used for the task. Initially anyway, there is likely to be some variation in how the task was tackled, and group members may find other students' strategies useful. Group discussion can be followed by a plenary session, in which group reporters describe one or two of the strategies reported in their groups. At this stage, the teacher can also suggest an alternative strategy.

Summary

In this paper I have argued that preparing learners to work in self-access should be viewed as preparing them to work autonomously. The concept of learning autonomy was examined and was characterised as having the following elements:

- motivation to learn the target language;
- a favourable attitude on the part of the learner to independent work;
- learning skills including knowledge of objectives, strategy selection, self-evaluation and self-monitoring.

An important focus of this view of learner preparation is learning strategies, and this concept was examined in some detail. Finally, five procedures for learner training were mentioned as a possible basis for the preparation of learners in learning skills.

5. *Learner support: interacting with learners*

EDITH ESCH

The idea of learner support is not new at all. Indeed, providing help and advice so that the right conditions are available for students to learn more or to become more efficient learners would be an excellent definition of 'teaching'.

What is new in the domain of language learning is that a number of important aspects of the language learning situation - as it has been institutionalised - have come to escape teacher control, because they are directly available to learners not only outside the classroom, but outside educational domains: ten years ago, the foreign language teacher was often the only source of input for her students. Now, and increasingly so, sources of linguistic information and reference material are available off the shelf, linguistic input is obtainable twenty four hours a day through the media, computer games can provide endless practice, while telephones, electronic mail networks and general increased mobility multiply occasions for genuine cross-linguistic communication. As a result, teachers and learners find their task both simplified and more complex while the nature of their respective roles has fundamentally changed.

Teaching has become simpler because many time-consuming language learning activities can be carried out by the learners themselves independently of the teacher. Most of the time, this takes place in a self-access centre or in a classroom operating in a self-access 'mode' where learners can organise and manage the learning by themselves. From the learners' point of view, the advantages are many as such systems offer both a much wider range of learning tools than the traditional classroom set up and increased flexibility in using these tools. The learners' task, on the other hand, has become much more complex because all decisions - when, how, for what purpose, with what materials etc - have to be made consciously, weighed, tested and evaluated by them. From this point of view, self-access systems are well adapted to promote a new learning culture because they require users to be actively engaged in the management of the learning task and to accept responsibility for their decisions.

However, from another point of view, the reallocation of roles in the pedagogical process means that teaching has become more complex too. If we think of learning as all the activities undertaken by individuals who have decided to acquire a foreign language and learning behaviour as the management of all the acts learners carry out with the objective of assimilating both linguistic knowledge and know-how, we have to accept that the most favourable learning environments will be those where learners are not in consumer role. In other words, good language teaching must be learner-centred and the more students take responsibility for the management of their own learning, the more likely they are to succeed in learning. When teachers had control over the input, they could plan all the activities taking place in the classroom and follow a pre-determined 'progression'. But from the moment they encourage learners to choose their own learning materials, to select what they want to concentrate upon, to design their own exercises and to specify their own criteria for evaluation, they have to relinquish control. The teachers' role changes along with their modes of intervention, from a proactive initiator's role to that of a listening negotiator's role. They need to find means of responding to learners' questions and of helping them manage their own learning. This requires that they not only find means of eliciting learners' talk and listen to them very carefully but can interpret learners' discourse (cf Riley's paper in Section 1) before responding and offering possible solutions. In other words they need to interact with learners.

Providing structures for interacting with learners is the main function of support systems. Efficient support systems create conditions which allow for learners to initiate interaction, and more generally facilitate and encourage interaction between learners and teachers. Support systems must not only be designed in relation to the overall aim of the institution but - and this is particularly important because we deal with language learning - they need to be implemented in an open and dynamic way based on genuine social interaction with the learners. The following are four 'golden rules' for designing support systems.

First listen

Support systems will be efficient only if learners can express their problems and/or difficulties in their own words so that the teacher or adviser can have access to the way in which they think about what is to be learnt, the learning task at hand and the way in which they think they should go about it. This argues for any question addressed to learners being as open-ended as possible (i.e. 'tell me/write about what you're doing' versus 'do you prefer drills on the simple past or drills on the subjunctive?'). If this listening stage is skipped the teacher's categories are imposed on the learners and a lot of effort may be wasted. It is easy to see why: if you distribute questionnaires asking learners to rate five pre-selected learning objectives in order of importance, it is predictable that all your learners will have these neatly organised learning objectives. You will be able to write reports and to make statistics but - just as you will not know how many of your learners hate drills anyway in the question above - you will know very little about the actual learning objectives of your learners either because they fall outside your list or because they express them in totally different ways. This holds whether support systems are designed for individual learners (interviews) or for groups (learner training activities) of learners. In either case, the quality of the support given will be directly related to the quality of the teacher's listening to what learners have to say.

These are a few of the most usual means of making people talk:

- Special group 'experiential' sessions can be organised on a punctual basis. The aim of these sessions is to make learners co-operate over a task - for example problem solving activities of the 'puzzle' kind - and to make explicit their strategies. During the Cambridge Conference in December '92, a number of these sessions were organised so that participants could observe for themselves what the benefits are in terms of self-knowledge.
- Learner training courses, or regular sessions which could be described as 'learning quality circles' allow for more substantial and long-term action. In our experience, once learners are at post-GCSE level, such courses can be run via the medium of the target language very successfully.
- 'Twinnings' between learners who are joining forces to study another language are the minimal mutual training unit. Another kind of 'pairing' arrangement is based on the complementarity between learners who wish to learn one another's language. To ensure their success, twinnings and exchange pairs require careful and diplomatic preparation.
- Face-to-face interviews with an adviser is an expensive (labour-intensive) but efficient support system (cf Cleary and Makin in Section 3). The advantage is that interviews

generally yield a lot of information - again, as long as the learner is given the floor! For example, typically, learners will start by talking about what is their main current concern. The learner's choice of first topic displays the learner's priorities and it has to be attended to - if only to be put into perspective - even though the adviser thinks it is not very important. Here again, an adviser has to avoid imposing the conversation's first topic as it is normally taken to be the reason for the session with the adviser. When learners have prepared a learning plan in advance, interviews are particularly useful because an experienced adviser can quickly detect from what the learner says where the plan is likely to go wrong, for example, when there is a mismatch between the stated objectives and the choice of materials or of technique.

- Electronic mail is an increasingly frequent means of interacting with learners for advising purposes. L Makin's experience, reported in Section 4, explores the impact of this new medium on the advising task.

The mechanisms for interacting with learners need not be expensive. Cheap versions include:

- Group 'introductory sessions' to the self-access system.
  Instead of giving a lot of factual information which people forget anyway and which is better given in written form, such sessions can be used as a means of making new users express their views on language and on learning. In our Language Centre, I have observed that new users who come to these sessions may have very similar profiles, for example they all happen to need to learn romance languages for research purposes and they all think that the main problem in learning foreign languages is memorisation of vocabulary. In other cases, they represent extreme opposites, i.e. some of them are convinced that 'grammar' is the only thing which counts and that there is absolutely no point in even trying to interact with native speakers until one is absolutely certain that one is able to produce 'correct sentences', while the others are totally convinced that the key to learning a foreign language is going there. It is sufficient, they claim, to live there and basically to 'talk to the natives' even if it means making a fool of oneself and pidginising! Personally, I find that the following pattern works best:
  - New users are invited to introduce themselves.
  - Then users are asked to work in pairs and to write down 'what the qualities of a good language learner are'.
  - After ten to fifteen minutes, pairs are asked to report and keywords are written on the board.This helps me target what I say and focus on the areas of interest to the people in front of me while it gives newcomers to the University - who often have never met before - a chance of witnessing how varied the motivations, needs and learning strategies of others can be when it comes to foreign languages.
- Questionnaires or sheets to fill in: not yes/no questions nor multiple choice but as open-ended as possible so that learners are led to use their own words.
- A simple white board in your self-access system for learners to exchange messages with other learners or with the teaching staff. I find that in our Centre, students use it mainly to attract the attention of others to TV programmes in foreign languages they find particularly interesting or useful for learning.

'Listen first' does not mean that you should not intervene and that learners should be left to do whatever they want; on the contrary, learners do have a lot in common and it is possible to identify 'categories' of learners, preferred routes, and predictable gaps in a programme. What is difficult for the teacher is to choose the moment and mode of intervention so that the learner is receptive.

Be relevant

Perhaps this is the most difficult 'rule' to follow because it is the most demanding. In the domain of advising, this really follows from the 'listen first' rule. One needs to develop techniques to meet learners' ways of thinking about language and language learning. For example, many students insist that their problem is that they need 'grammar', when in fact they mean that they are confused by the presentation of the materials and would like the organisation of the syllabus to be more explicit or more predictable. To achieve relevance requires that the adviser does not dismiss the idea that the problem is 'grammar', but rather orientates talk to those features of grammar which help language learning, such as, for example, predictability, thus offering a conceptual bridge to the learner to talk about other ways of 'making sense' of the language system or 'bringing order' to the learning task. Achieving relevance is also the guiding principle of librarians for choosing the keywords which are access points to materials (cf Cleary and Cembalo in Section 4). When it comes to cataloguing and to references, the exercise can be extremely difficult. The catalogue is used by very different kinds of users (learners, advisers, technical staff, etc) and each category needs specialised information which is of no use - and at best opaque - to the other categories.

Be flexible

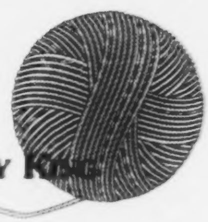
The degree of flexibility of an institution is often an important evaluation measure for learners. With the kind of technology currently available to those who manage self-access systems for language learning, lack of flexibility is a danger because technology tends to favour systems-based approaches and impoverished or simplified views of learning.

To remain flexible allows one to respond to new or unexpected needs in an intelligent way and is often the key to steady development and evolution. From the point of view of management, 'just in time techniques' are useful because they avoid problems of stock management and help reduce costs (i.e. what on earth do you do with courses which have become of historical interest?) but they also force the staff to think anew how best to respond to new generations of learners whose expectations keep changing. On the other hand, being flexible has limits and part of the management of learning is to take constraints into account. Last year, a research student contacted our advising service to ask whether we had materials to learn Sanskrit. When the student came for his appointment several days later, the adviser was naturally rather chuffed to be able to produce several courses as well as a grammar but was astounded when the student dismissed the lot 'en bloc' without even looking at the books, apparently not aware that this was it!

Be transparent

Learner support systems are in their infancy but it is clear that more and more of them will evolve and develop as means to interact with learners not only in self-access systems for language learning but in many other contexts. Institutionally, transparency about the services you offer to support learners and the new functions trained staff fill is useful for several reasons. First, when 'teachers' become 'advisers' it emphasises new aspects of the role of the profession. The change in name makes both teachers and learners stop and think of what characterises the difference between the two words. Promoting new words does promote change because new words help shift the perspective or angle through which we are looking at the world. The other advantage is that from a professional point of view, it is important to have new professional functions officially recognised as this goes along with career paths, professional acceptance, promotion, training opportunities, etc.

6. *'Whatever is worth knowing can never be taught'* (Oscar Wilde)



A dialogue between PETER FORBES *and* ANNY KING

Peter Forbes is ICL's Human Resources Manager and as such he is interested in training. For many years he has supported initiatives aiming to build bridges between industry and higher education. This is how he met Anny King, a French specialist who was also Enterprise Tutor at Hatfield Polytechnic before coming to Cambridge as Senior Language Adviser. ICL is a company which operates throughout Europe. They are interested in foreign languages because they need to have staff flexible enough to adapt quickly to new people, new countries and new cultures, and also because their staff need to feel comfortable in a constantly changing technological environment and to manage change. The Language Centre at Cambridge is also involved in supporting the management of change. Anny King's role as Senior Language Adviser is to help academic staff use new technologies for teaching languages, but she is also responsible for finding means of responding to the increasing demand for language provision throughout the University.

She says: *Our challenge is to try and make language learning available to as many students as possible, whatever their field of study. Learning a language also has an intrinsic educational value. It opens up new horizons, new ways of thinking and doing things. It makes the learners reflect about their language, about themselves as human beings and as learners. Also, in learning a language you have to make the decisions all the time, and to be flexible. Flexibility of mind is vital.*

Indeed, independently of the context where it takes place, language learning has a special place in staff training because language competence is something you simply cannot force onto people and because the acquisition of a new language often goes along with many other changes associated with new opportunities in terms of social and cultural life. Moreover, as indicated by Anny King, learning a new language requires that learners reflect on their own language system and on the way it is used in society. For all these reasons, it is not surprising that Anny King and Peter Forbes quickly realised that helping people learn foreign languages was very similar to helping people manage change generally, and that it can sometimes be a means of making adults become aware of and come to terms with their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

The following dialogue is a transcript of a telephone conversation.

A learning organisation

AK Do you train people in languages or do you employ graduates who have these skills or both?

PF Both. In our graduates we are looking for openness of mind. We want some basic skills of course and in some cases the ability to work with technology, but over and above that we look for people who are adaptable, who are good listeners, who can work with teams of people from different backgrounds, having different ideas, who can integrate easily. Integration is very important in business. Everybody in the company is expected to develop their own skills - we like to consider ourselves a learning organisation.

AK What do you mean by 'learning organisation'?

PF I mean that the organisation not only expects its members to change and become more self-directed but it supports them in finding their own path. We expect people to think for themselves, to work out for themselves how best to progress in their work and career. But we also have developed support systems of training, coaching and monitoring to help staff become more autonomous.

AK I know what you mean by training. But what exactly is coaching and mentoring?

PF Knowledge in itself is **not** the most important thing. The most important thing is how to use knowledge. How to ask questions. People develop themselves when they are in their jobs, particularly in the first few years. At ICL the coach is there to help individuals improve their personal skills, i.e. ability to communicate, solve problems, work in teams, which enables them to be more effective in their jobs. Most young people at ICL also have a mentor who is remote from their day-to-day business and is expected to take a longer-term view of things.

Investing in people

AK ICL had a logo 'investing in people'. Is it still the case?

PF Yes. For the past five/six years ICL has had a strategy which is called 'investing in people'. It is an umbrella approach covering all the different processes to allow people to develop themselves further so that we get the best of our people. We have appraisals, objectives, planned development and also training.

AK So you see this as a two-way process: you invest in people and people invest their energy, intelligence, time, imagination in ICL and it is the combination of the two which makes these people and ICL move forward.

PF Yes, it is. Most of our graduates now go on to a short training programme when they first join the company. The programme is aimed at helping them to manage their own learning. Some graduates do this instinctively, but many are quite shocked when they are not given a prescriptive way forward.

AK It's the same in education, in language learning. When one refers to language learning, people tend to translate this as 'language teaching', and the traditional way of teaching a language is prescriptive. The teacher knows it all and tells the student what to learn, how much to learn and how to learn it. Teaching should not be in opposition to learning. They are both in complementarity. In fact, if you are a successful learner it means that you are teaching yourself well. In French there's one basic verb *apprendre* for to teach/learn. We encourage our students to manage their learning time better, to develop their learning styles and strategies. Many find it difficult because they come from a culture which has fostered a kind of dependency on the teacher. I find that it makes the student think less, it makes him mindless and it gives the teacher too much power.

The power that is within

PF I agree. And there are different kinds of power. There's the power of the teacher, the power the teacher has over the student but the best power is the power that's within and eventually that's what counts. What matters is what they do by themselves, with their friends and colleagues. As for us, we have to give them the right environment.

AK In the Language Centre we put great emphasis on the environment. The word 'environment' reflects not only that the language is around you, but also that learning is a long-term and dynamic process. Learning a language is a life-long experience and it is a protracted thing. It does not happen between 2 and 3 on a Friday afternoon only or between 10 and 11 on a Tuesday morning, it is an on-going process. The student must be offered the possibility to learn when she has the time, the need or wants to do it. For me a good learning environment is like the Garden of Eden - everything you might need or want is there for you to enjoy, but you must learn how best to enjoy it, you must make choices. The choice the learner makes is important. If she chooses well, she will progress and succeed and move forward. If she makes a mistake in choosing and it does not work, provided she understands why she has not been successful, this will make her move forward. Whichever way, it is positive. But we find it isn't easy to break through the traditional barrier of teaching and learning. This culture change is not easy to make either for the teacher or indeed the learner!

The management of change

PF Isn't it Machiavelli who said that the hardest thing in life is to begin something? We shouldn't be alarmed by the difficulties people encounter. What you've said is very much an echo to me of the management of change. As a company we've been handling change for the last ten/twelve years and we have developed an understanding of what that means - a willingness to embrace the change rather than resist it. But when you have to undergo a radical change, go from 'comfortable A' to 'uncomfortable B', you have to go through a process which is not always pleasant nor easy but it's part of the growth of an individual or of a company.

AK Part of my job at the Language Centre is to 'train' teachers to teach languages using new technologies and the appropriate methodologies - actually I hate the word 'train'. I mainly see my job as making people think, but quite a few come to me to get 'recipes'. And they go away empty-handed because I have no recipe. Others who do come to me with an open mind and are prepared to do the thinking for themselves go away with a lot and in the process they develop. But people, like plants, I believe, develop in different ways and at different rates. Some will go on a long way, others won't move, others will go some distance and then stop. I have to accept that. I don't think you can push people and as you certainly know, some are more expandable than others, and from a manager's point of view to know how you can help the development is very important. As you said yourself, there is always resistance to change. But we have technology, it would be a mistake, it would be inconceivable not to use it or ignore it. But I must also say that we must use technology not for its own sake but in the service of education and learning. To think that technology is the end all and be all is also a mistake.

They need to navigate themselves

PF That is right. Technology is a liberator, but it is not enough. If we just provide our clients with clever technology and nothing else, they won't come back. I like the analogy about recipe. If we look out of my window we can see the river Thames. It's not a bad image because we're talking about people needing navigational aids. We can give them the help they need to navigate, but they need to navigate themselves.

AK I agree. But the 'help' is not easy to give or indeed to receive. Too much help can inhibit and not enough can be counter-productive. It's a fine line to draw. I must say I particularly liked what you said about developing 'the listener' in your graduates. In any work dealing with people - and indeed whenever one deals with people - the most important quality is that of 'listening'. If you have your ears constantly to the ground then you know when to help, when to withdraw, when indeed to shake someone up, if need be, when to reassure, when to cajole them.

PF I heard someone the other day say 'excellent listeners guarantee successful teams'.

AK Yes, I often tell my colleagues that a good listener is generally a good teacher. But let me come back to a point you made earlier on. You said that you wanted your graduates to learn, that at ICL learning is at the centre of training and development.

PF Indeed. Learning is at the centre of our training development. Our young people are dealing more and more with project management and consultancy. You can't predict comprehensively what they will have to do. They will have to work that out for themselves. They will have to tackle complex problems and come up against considerable pressure. Pressure of time, pressure of money, pressure from customers changing their minds, etc. So for us people who are able to operate in what we call 'a learning environment' is a prerequisite. Wasn't it Oscar Wilde who said 'whatever is worth knowing can never be taught'? What is needed is a combination of personal skills, knowledge and attitudes - the motivation and willingness to learn. And whereas many young people think that knowledge is the most important thing, perhaps followed by skills and attitude, I would say that it is actually the other way round - attitude is by far the most important thing followed by personal skills and knowledge.

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Wenden A, *Learner strategies for learner autonomy* (Prentice Hall International, 1991)

LEARNING STRATEGIES

There are a number of recent books and articles which discuss learning strategies. The following are among the most accessible.

- Dickinson L, *Learner training for language learning* (Authentik, Dublin, 1992)
  This book regards learner training in large part as training in learning strategies. It describes learning strategies, and gives examples of them. In addition, it suggests ways that learners can be prepared for greater independence in learning.

- Ellis G and B Sinclair, *Learning to learn English - a course in learner training* (CUP, 1989)
  This is a course in learner training designed for learners of English, but many of the ideas in the book could be adapted for use with learners of other languages. Stage 1 contains

activities designed to prepare learners for language learning, while Stage 2 covers topics like extending vocabulary, dealing with grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

- Oxford R L, *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know* (Newbury House, USA, 1990)
  The book is concerned with providing foreign language and ESL teachers with practical suggestions for helping their students to develop language learning strategies. Detailed suggestions for strategy use in each of the language skills are included, as well as case studies and suggestions for setting up similar programmes.

- Wenden A and J Rubin, *Learner strategies in language learning* (Prentice Hall International, 1987)
  This book consists of a collection of papers written by prominent researchers in the field of learning strategies. It is an excellent introduction to research in this field, and is written in a way that makes it reasonably accessible to teachers.

- Wenden A, *Learner strategies for learner autonomy* (Prentice Hall, 1991)
  This book is concerned with topics such as defining autonomy, helping students to become autonomous, the relationship of learner strategies with autonomy, and the integration of an autonomous approach with the classroom. The book takes a practical approach to the topic and contains many activities to help teachers to devise and evaluate learning plans and materials for autonomy.

ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO HEIGHTEN AWARENESS OF LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES

- Ellis G and B Sinclair, *Learning to learn English: a course in learner training* (CUP, 1989)
  Ellis and Sinclair suggest at the beginning of their learner training coursebook that learners use a brief questionnaire to give an indication of learning style. The outcome of the questionnaire is a score which can then be checked off against a brief description of four styles. The four possibilities are *analytic style*, *relaxed style*, *a mixture* and *not sure*. For example, if a learner scores between 23 and 27 points, then she is categorised as analytic, and a brief description is given about how she might go about language learning, e.g. 'Score: 23-27 points - analytic? You may feel it is important to be as accurate as possible all the time. You probably prefer the sort of language learning where you need to think carefully...' Each analysis goes on to offer a set of suggestions tailored to that style.

- Oxford R L, *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know* (Newbury House, USA, 1990)
  The strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) has been developed by Oxford with the express purpose of drawing learner's attention to the strategies they use, and to alternatives which they do not use, but which may be useful to them. The instructions to teachers for using the SILL suggest telling the learners that it...

  > *...is designed to assess how you go about language learning. Most students who have taken the SILL have found it interesting and fun. Each item represents a particular kind of language learning behaviour. The results will help you know more about yourself as a language learner, and it will help me (the teacher) to help you learn more effectively.* (p279)

GOOD AND BAD LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- Gibbs B, *Teaching students to learn - a student centred approach* (OUP, 1981)

Instructions

Working alone (three minutes). Think back to some past bad experience of learning - it could be in school, in sports, in a hobby, anything that was particularly awful, it may have been boring or humiliating or you may have simply learned nothing at all. Jot down a few notes on why it was so bad. Now do the same for a good learning experience (3 minutes) - an experience where you learned a lot, were successful, enjoyed it and were interested. What was it that made learning so good? Jot down a few notes.

Work in pairs (ten minutes). Form a group of four with another pair. From your pooled experiences of good and bad learning, can you see any themes arising - things which for you tend to characterise good and bad learning in general? Each group of four appoints a chairman who notes down what is said under two columns: things that lead to unsatisfactory learning and things that tend to support and encourage very satisfactory learning. Note down as many things as you can under these headings.

Working in plenary (twenty minutes): The teacher says *I'd like each group of four, in turn, to read out one item from the list. I'd like everyone else to ask that group to explain itself, to make the meaning of each item clear. Also for each item I'd like suggestions as to how that may effect the way you are learning here - in this school/college/etc now. Continue until items or time are exhausted.*

- Oxford R L. 'The best and worst - an exercise to tap perceptions of language learning experiences and strategies', *Foreign Language Annals*, 22, pp447-454 (1989)
  Oxford's activity is similar to Gibbs's, except it is specifically designed for language learners. •

3

Providing resources: the principle of relevance

This practical section stresses the importance of taking into account language learners' actual needs in the provision of resources and the organisation of self-access systems. To make the point, Edith Esch draws on readers' experience as consumers in the context of supermarkets, which are self-access systems of a kind. Because we all share the experience - and often have strong views about it - the metaphor strikes a chord, but beware, there is a catch at the end!

The two case studies which follow are intended to demonstrate several aspects of the principle of relevance in two self-access systems for language learning set up in the same town.

One aspect is that self-access sytems need to be dynamic and flexible structures to remain relevant. They have to be able to respond to changes in the characteristics of the target population of learners. One does not set up a self-access system for ever but for particular people. This is the main thrust of Anne Ife's case study from Anglia Polytechnic University where the self-access system originally sprang from the institution's role in continuing education, then changed as other roles brought in new categories of users. Similarly, the University of Cambridge Language Centre has had to expand its European languages operation massively in the '90s and Liisa Cleary and Lucila Makin describe how it maintains its role of support for researchers who need less popular languages in their field work.

Another aspect is that of staff quality. Flexibility of structures may be necessary but it is not sufficient to achieve relevance. The capacity of all staff concerned - from the receptionist to the adviser - to observe and to analyse users' behaviour, to get feedback from learners and above all to talk problems through together is crucial for development. Both case studies reflect high levels of staff care and training, an area to which Jack Lonergan comes back in Section 5.

Finally, a wide range of support systems (see Section 4 for more detailed examples and industrial contexts in particular) and, more generally, the creation of a supportive environment for collaborative work constitute essential *ingredients of self-access systems for language learning. The case studies remind us that whatever the context may be, successful self-access systems are never associated with isolation of the learners.*

Suggested readers' guide

This section on providing resources for self-access language learning gives readers a good idea of the kind of practical issues self-access leads to.

Access point

For teachers/advisers and policy makers under pressure of time, chapter 7 - self-access, not self-service - is one of the recommended access points. The other access points are for teachers/advisers - Section 2 (ch 5) and for policy makers - Section 5 (ch 14).

Suggested follow-up

- *Teachers/advisers*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  If you have come to this section from Section 2, you may want to read chapter 9 and then go on to Section 4 (ch 10). Then continue to case studies: chapter 8 in this section and also Sections 5 and 6.

  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  Read also chapter 5 in Section 2 before continuing to chapter 4 in Section 2 and Section 4 for further discussion of relevant issues.

- *Policy makers*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  Chapter 7 in this section (plus chapter 14 in Section 5) discusses some relevant issues which you may want to follow up with practical examples in chapters 8 and 9 in this section as well as Section 6 (ch 16). Finally, case study: chapter 15 in Section 5.

  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  Read also chapter 14 in Section 5 before carrying on to practical examples in Section 6 (ch 16).

- *Librarians*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  After this section you may want to carry on to Section 4 for further discussion and chapter 11 specifically for practical examples.

7. Self-access, not self-service: Tesco versus Taylor's

EDITH ESCH

How best to organise a self-access system and where to find a set of evaluation criteria for them? To establish such criteria, we can rely on our experience of big supermarkets, and for two reasons. First, it is an experience we all share from the point of view of the user and secondly, supermarkets are apparently very successful self-services. Relying on our experience as consumers is thus a way of establishing a list of criteria which are likely to be useful - and perhaps necessary, if not sufficient - in the organisation of self-access systems designed with language learning in mind. Let's see first what we can learn from Tesco's.

Access (finding it and getting there)

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Is it easy to get there? Easy to find? Can you park easily? (No barriers with special coins?) Is it accessible to the disabled?

COMMENT:
Educational establishments, as a rule, seem to score very badly here, mainly because they often operate on the notion that they are acting for a closed community where 'anybody worth it knows or should know' and maintain an 'in-group' behaviour which limits access. So, to the question 'Where is the Language Centre?', the answer too often is: 'Find the John Bloggs building, East Site, go to the third floor, turn left, pass Professor Smith's Medieval History Research Unit, go along the corridor and it's the second door to the right just after the Ladies.'

ACTION:
Ask yourself whether it is clear what your centre is about and whether it is easy to find. Access can often be improved by clear signing at relatively low cost. If you are setting up a new centre, make sure you raise the issue of access to the disabled from the outset (i.e. space on the second floor of a building with no lift is no good).

Access (finding it open)

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Is it open when I can go shopping? Are the opening hours well advertised and easy to remember?

COMMENT:
If opening hours are not simple and easy to remember, people will hesitate before coming. This can affect language learners' attendance badly. Whether we are talking of university students having an hour's gap between two lectures, or of further education students coming at the end of a long working day, the choice between the language centre and the coffee shop or pub is made in a matter of seconds where uncertainty does not help the case of foreign languages.

ACTION:
Staff time means money. The opening hours of your language centre are expensive. If you have to choose, open at those times when you are sure to attract many users and above all, ensure the pattern is simple, i.e. predictable and/or easy to memorise and advertise.

Access (security)

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Is access so easy that anybody can pinch cassettes or dictionaries without anyone noticing and/or doing anything about it?

COMMENT:
Effective security systems are very expensive but the wider population you serve, the more likely you are to have security problems.

ACTION:
Consider the cost-effectiveness of security measures. If only a few audio cassettes go 'missing' every year, investing in a security system is not worth the trouble. Also consider taking measures which make the contents of your self-access system undesirable. Typically, one-hour video cartridges are NOT stolen. A way of preventing the theft of books is to bind copies in a 'distinctive' fashion, although, in this case, one has to balance the security advantage with the disadvantage on the criterion of 'explicitness' (see below).

Simplicity (not complicated)

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Are arrangements based on common sense? Is frozen stuff on the way out so that ice cream is not half-melted by the time you reach your car? Is it easy to circulate? Are the tills arranged to prevent queues from forming?

COMMENT:
This is very difficult to achieve particularly as one tends to introduce successive 'improvements' by adding on bits and pieces for the benefit of particular groups of learners without taking a fresh look at the organisation of the whole. The system can become simpler for some of the users while becoming unbearably obscure for others.

ACTION:
Is your centre unnecessarily complicated? When did you last ask your users about it? Also, monitor for things which are underused: either they are no longer needed or they are useful but too difficult to find.

Simplicity (predictable)

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Do they keep changing the place of stuff in order to attract your attention to products you are not looking for and make you change your buying patterns?

COMMENT:
People do not like changing generally, and more particularly, changing their habits once routines have been established. When changes need to be made in the

organisation or display of the materials, steps should be taken to warn users and explain what the changes are about, so that they are perceived positively.

ACTION:
Observe the behaviour of new users to identify what they perceive as predictable. Explain and advertise changes.

Explicitness

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Are arrangements transparent? Is curry under Spices or Fine Foods (or both?) Are indications visually helpful? Do you get an itemised bill at the cash desk?

COMMENT:
Professionally made notices are very expensive. The same is true of lighting and of bar-coded systems. Many 'home-made' notices are never read or look terrible very quickly.

ACTION:
Test whether users effectively see what you think they should see in your centre. Observe where users need to look on arrival before deciding on the location of important notices. If you are setting up a new centre, explicitness and visibility should be priorities.

Truthfulness

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Are labels misleading? Do you need a pocket calculator to work out which soap powder is really the cheapest? Do the same tins often indicate different prices?

COMMENT:
Beware of 'Learn French in Ten Days' magic packs and of their powerful impact on learners' representations about languages and language learning (see P Riley in Section 1). Learners can vary tremendously in the way they define what learning a language is and in the way they approach the task of working on particular materials. Learners whom you think are at the same level of proficiency can make surprisingly contrasted evaluations of the difficulty of the same text because of such individual differences.

ACTION:
Descriptions of the materials must be provided and time must be spent on selecting the descriptive categories for the catalogue(s). These categories must be meaningful to the learners and take into account their state of knowledge when they start. Some idea of the time it takes on average to go through a course or what the average learner can reasonably expect to be able to do after X hours of study may be given. However, it should always be made clear that such evaluations are only indicative and eventually depend on individual learners.

Relevance

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:
Is there a lot of meaningless information? Are items generally in your price range?

COMMENT:

This is related to the homogeneity of the population you are serving but also to the way records on materials are organised and which bits of the records are accessible to whom. For example, information which is important to your technician - such as the recording speed - may be totally irrelevant to learners. In the same way, information which may be illuminating to trained teachers - i.e. 'functions' - may confuse learners.

ACTION:

Think about ways in which to make information as relevant as possible to the typical learner. Special information packages for particular categories of users (i.e. modern linguists, engineers, researchers etc) are a good way of avoiding cluttering the centre with information which is meaningless to many users while giving you a chance of targeting your effort very carefully.

Sufficiency and scope

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:

Is it well supplied? Are items sold replaced quickly enough on the shelves and unsold items got rid of? Is there a lot of variety within categories of items (i.e. a good cheese or wine selection)?

COMMENT:

These are matters of policy. Supply will depend on the needs of the population your self-access centre is aiming at, but also on whether there is a policy of diversification or, on the contrary, a policy tending to pool learners into large categories - undifferentiated in the first instance - such as 'German elementary'. In either case, feedback mechanisms are required for the purpose of monitoring how successful the policy is.

ACTION:

What is the policy of your centre? If there is any ambiguity about this and/or about priorities, make sure you clarify the situation as soon as possible. What feedback mechanisms have you put in place? Do you keep records of requests unattended to for future use? How do you know the selection of materials you have is sufficient/insufficient?

Appeal and eventfulness

CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS:

Is it an uninviting place one wishes to leave as soon as possible? Is the staff helpful? Do the cashiers have vacant stares and put bags of potatoes on the peaches? Are there features which make the dreary task of stocking groceries more exciting (special prices, tastings etc)?

COMMENT:

Much of the appeal of a self-access centre will be associated with the quality of the staff and their ability to attend to learners' actual needs and generally to communicate with them. Arranging events is a question of style, but any 'out of the ordinary' feature which helps users replace their learning effort into its social context must be a bonus.

ACTION:
Observe the learners in your self-access centre. Do you have the impression they like being there and/or that they know the staff? Do you have a staff training and development policy? What are your staff training priorities? How many staff are learning foreign languages? Have you organised any special event - with cultural delegations and/or language societies etc - over the past year?

Conclusions

It is clear that when it comes to the management of resources, we can learn a lot from the typical arrangements and procedures of big supermarkets. However, supermarkets are not always successful and there are cases where they fail to make themselves relevant to customers. I, for one, do not go to Tesco's but to Taylor's, my village shop. This is because Tesco's do not provide me with what I need. In fact, Tesco's is not at all interested in what I need, but only in making me believe that I do need what they sell.

My motivations to go to Taylor's are as follows. First, my view of the world is such that I try to support village shops. Secondly, Taylor's is very good indeed. For example, they give me credit. Paying at the end of each week has two advantages: I can control very precisely what I spend weekly and my kids can go shopping and have items put on my account in my absence. Another advantage is that Taylor's know me. At the end of a long working day, being welcomed by name is refreshing. Also, their working hours are perfect for me. I usually come back from work just before their closing time. Furthermore, they are situated at walking distance from where I live so that access to a car is irrelevant.

Taylor's sell good quality traditional English products, i.e.they are not in the business of trying to attract me with frozen Brie cheese, which I would find irritating. Another point is that Taylor's are attending to my real needs. For example, if I buy milk one evening Mr or Mrs Taylor will tell me if my daughter has already bought a pint on her way back from school. This attention to customers' actual needs seems to go along with straight common sense. If I go to Taylor's one morning to ask for ant-killer and it is out of stock, typically, they will offer to lend me their own ant-killer. Finally, they trust me. They do not bother about my cheque card number which saves a lot of time and if I happen to forget to sign a cheque they give me a ring.

So all in all Mr and Mrs Taylor make the business of buying friendly enough for me to choose positively to restrict the range of goods I have access to for a human view of exchanging goods for money. In choosing to buy from my village shop, I can keep control of what I spend and I take responsibility for the consequences of the constraints. In this sense only, the kind of self-services you select - whether for buying or for language learning - reflect very accurately what your priorities are. Here the comparison must stop as languages will never be on sale or for sale.

8. *From continuing to higher education: open-access learning at Anglia Polytechnic University*

ANNE IFE

The background

Anglia Polytechnic University's first open-access Language Centre opened on its Cambridge campus in the autumn of 1988. The original aim of providing such a centre was a simple one: namely, to create a pleasant and encouraging environment where a learner could easily access the foreign language at any time. In the run-up to 1992 reception of European television was becoming much more easily available, audio-visual courses were proliferating, and interest in learning languages was rampant. As long-time providers of language tuition to a wide range of learners we knew the difficulties besetting them, especially those trying to learn less easily accessible languages with little contact. We also knew how easily non-specialist linguists can be deterred in their attempts to get to grips with a language. Providing them with a bank of resources in an encouraging and supportive environment, surrounded by others engaged in similar pursuits, seemed a logical step to take.

Ironically perhaps, the Language Centre sprang initially more from Anglia's continuing education role than from its higher education (HE) role, although the Centre was always seen as a desirable facility for undergraduates too. Only a few years later the emphasis has changed radically: it would be fair to say that the Language Centre now plays a much more integral role in Anglia's mainstream provision, since open-access learning has been written in as an essential component of the modular scheme of study. At the same time the Centre continues to cater for a very varied market including both HE and the continuing education market, business subscribers, and learners of both foreign languages and English.

The facilities

The Language Centre has expanded considerably since its inauguration and has already been relocated to cope with expansion. A visitor will now find it located adjacent to the languages department in a suite of rooms which additionally includes three language laboratories, one of these a multimedia laboratory. The room is attractively furnished and is designed deliberately to create a welcoming and comfortable environment. Facilities include:

- twenty mini-labs + individual work stations;
- eight TV monitors for satellite TV reception/video playback (each equipped with dual sets of earphones for paired viewing);
- wall-mounted cassette and video storage;
- two PCs with CALL and access to on-line dictionaries;
- study tables;
- multilingual notices/posters.

Materials installed in the Language Centre include:

- the main published self-tuition courses in French, German, Italian, Spanish;
- in-house/support materials for those languages, plus English;

- beginners courses in twelve other languages (Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese etc);
- reference materials (grammars, dictionaries);
- course dossiers;
- European teletext;
- a range of European periodicals;
- videos of current news ;
- video materials;
- information on language learning techniques/courses/careers.

Funding

It is worth mentioning sources of funding, since this is usually a crucial factor in HE resourcing. In many institutions the Language Centre is an independent entity, separate from the languages department and operating its own teaching programme. Often this reflects a particular philosophy within a languages department which does not count language teaching among its main concerns. This is not the case at Anglia, where the Language Centre has always been located within the School of Languages and where language teaching at all levels is a major concern. The School has the responsibility for all language teaching across the University, whether to students taking languages as main subjects in degree programmes or to students from other departments taking languages as options.

The departmental budget made the initial investment in equipment and materials and provides a small annual budget, repaid in part by income from a public membership scheme. Costs to be covered include teaching remission for a full-time member of staff to oversee policy, organise part-time staffing and operate an advice system; payment for final year language students who work as receptionists for the public sessions (a benefit to users and receptionists alike, since the latter get to know materials and the problems of learners, and the former can often receive sound information on their language problem from people who are themselves able linguists); and the cost of the departmental technicians who have Language Centre upkeep included as part of their duties. Recently the retirement of one technically qualified technician has permitted the appointment of a badly needed learning resources technician to finalise and maintain catalogue systems and oversee resources. As yet the Centre is not fully supervised, so an electronic security system has been another major outlay.

In general then, the cost is borne by the department and offset in part by earned income, although recently, as the role of languages has become more central to institutional policy, the Cambridge Language Centre has received generous capital funding from the University for updating of equipment and furniture. In addition, a second, sister centre has been established on the University's Chelmsford campus to support language learning on that site.

Users

The Language Centre today serves a number of different categories of user, namely:

- full-time and part-time undergraduates learning foreign languages as a main subject or an option;
- students of English: EFL plus ERASMUS exchange students from partner universities;
- public subscribers: independent learners and business clients.

These categories were broadly the same at the outset; the difference now is in balance and numbers. In the early days it was undoubtedly the general public or individual business users who made best use of the facilities on offer. Around 70 private individuals used the Centre in the first year, a good number of them beginners, but many people were 'topping up' or reviving a rusty school qualification. Numbers have been affected in recent years by the recession and probably by the advent of cabled television, bringing European channels to many homes in the area. There are encouraging signs latterly, however, of revived interest above and beyond the steady nucleus of users of more recent years.

The age of people who have come has been varied, as are their backgrounds, which have ranged from school teachers preparing for a diversified curriculum to those hoping for promotion or those simply planning a holiday or just wanting to maintain contact with a language and culture. A few dedicated souls have been bent on achieving GCSEs or A-level qualifications and have achieved their goals.

Most of those who have come to Anglia have expressed frustration with traditional community education, which tends to progress slowly and be geared towards those using language study as a social outlet - a valuable function in itself, but not one which can always satisfy the more ambitious.

Of the business clients, few of those who have received Language Centre membership as part of a package have actually seemed to make use of it. It seems therefore as if the facilities offered may have looked attractive in prospect, but less so when it has come to finding extra time, in addition to the time spent with a teacher, to work alone in the Language Centre.

Among the full-time and part-time students, the foreign learners of English adopted the idea of open-access learning rather more quickly than the UK students - perhaps because having paid for courses they were determined to exploit the facilities to the full. From the beginning they were regularly to be found working with the audio tapes supplied as support materials for their courses. Other full-time students appreciated the easy access to European television but did not initially use the centre in large numbers or very often. Watching satellite TV was easily the biggest attraction and was usually a recreational activity.

In subsequent years the change of emphasis has come largely from weight of users in the full-time student category. Increasingly undergraduates have come to use the Language Centre for study, rather than for recreational purposes, and have begun to use it in large numbers for aural or writing practice activities, for prescribed viewing, for contact with live news programmes and for collecting information from tape, video or dossiers.

Modes of access

When the Language Centre first began operation, full-time students (both FL and EFL) had access at any time during the day, except for lunch-times and evenings and occasions when it was reserved for class-specific learner training. Lunch-time and evening sessions were reserved for those enrolled on the public membership scheme, which gave unlimited use of the facilities during opening hours for the duration of the membership (either a three month or a twelve month period). In addition, Language Centre membership was offered as a value-added incentive as part of a package to business clients requiring language courses and to evening course students.

With the subsequent growth of the Language Centre and increased pressure from full-time students it is no longer reasonable to exclude them during public sessions and the two types of user now share the facilities, the membership scheme continuing on the same basis as before.

This sharing of facilities has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, increased use among undergraduates brings improved facilities as staff effort is directed towards resourcing the open-access work that is now an integral part of full-time courses. At the same time, the presence of large numbers of full-time students competing for the space and materials means that the Language Centre cannot now be the protected, intimate environment it once was for outside users. Inevitably this deters some: confronting large numbers of students who are clearly on home territory cannot be easy for those of nervous disposition. This may impinge most on the public lunch-time sessions, since evening sessions tend to be less popular with those who have been studying all day. This is unfortunate because offering a day-time session was intended to help those who have family commitments or who live in rural districts and suffer from inadequate transport.

Support systems

The degree of autonomy of learners making use of the Language Centre has always been varied, including at one end the truly independent, autonomous learner (mainly the public subscribers), and at the other the learner who has ample teacher support and uses the Language Centre as a backup for traditional teaching. In a sense this last category has reasonably well developed support systems, but the former is more of a problem. It was for the autonomous learner in particular that the Language Centre has tried a number of different types of support system, some more successful than others.

The first was an advice system: an early form of support offered telephone counselling, followed by a personal interview, with the possibility of subsequent advice sessions. Interestingly, while plenty of users availed themselves of the first two, few returned for further advice. In general learners did not seem to feel that advice on learning strategies could help them. They did ask for advice on specific language problems from the Centre supervisors and also for access to a native speaker. This was subsequently built in to membership and proved successful, with learners able to book a half-hour session, one-to-one or in a group of up to four, to practise with a native what has been learnt independently.

In addition, a 'conversation exchange' system operates: English learners of foreign languages are put in touch with the many foreign learners of English to swap conversation in the two languages. Feedback shows that some of these informal arrangements work very effectively and lead not only to language development but also to social interaction and lasting friendships.

These 'human' support systems are vital to anyone studying autonomously. But also important are the 'non-human' support systems. Anglia's Language Centre provides booklets describing layout and function plus booklet advice on learning a language for those who may prefer to read and ponder the experience they are having. It also has a printed catalogue and offers printed advice sheets on choosing materials relevant to specific needs or purposes.

The most current concern, however, is the finalising of a computerised catalogue of the materials which gives much fuller information on each course, tape or video stocked. The cataloguing system is one devised within the University and will permit users to access materials by language, by grade, by activity and by topic. It also permits cross-referencing. It is intended that all materials used for teaching will eventually be catalogued by the same system, thus allowing easily the addition of staff-created worksheets linked to particular materials.

We recognise that transparency is essential in a self-access system, especially one that is unsupervised for certain periods of the day, and we hope that the computerised catalogue, with user-friendly access, will be a major step forward in providing that much-needed transparency.

Nothing of course can fully replace the human element and a major goal must be the full-time supervision of the Centre, with staff able to advise on individual problems.

Materials

At the heart of any self-access system, however, are the materials. A sizeable nucleus of the Anglia materials are the well-known courses that are readily and publicly available, covering tourist, general purpose and commercial language. These were bought in because they are relatively self-contained, they offer the self-tuition guidance that autonomous learners need and because, in spite of their faults, they are there. The policy is to supplement these increasingly with in-house materials but, as everyone knows only too well, the amount of effort and time needed to produce even a small, usable piece of self-access material is considerable. Staff time needs to be made available, but it also has to be paid for and this is a problem which HE has yet to solve satisfactorily. Current education policy assumes too readily that 'open learning' is a panacea for large numbers and falling fees, without taking account of the hours needed to prepare quality open-access materials.

Since this is the case, our intention in tying the cataloguing system of the Language Centre in with the cataloguing of mainstream teaching materials is that this should boost output of relevant and related worksheets or activities to the benefit of all users. It should also help in the focusing of materials. Open-access materials can too easily become random and untargeted. An integrated system, however, will provide the framework for any usable piece of self-access material to be profitably stored and used by all learners.

Future

With the infrastructure of the Anglia Language Centre in place and functioning efficiently we must now look to the future. With ever increasing HE numbers working alongside public users the likelihood is that, in terms of space and equipment, capacity will soon be reached again. In view of this, steps have been taken while installing new laboratories to provide rooms that can offer additional audio and CALL facilities when not in use for teaching.

Priorities now must be the expansion of the range of materials and the evaluation of the learning of different groups of learners, both full-time and fully autonomous. As the open-access mode of learning gradually becomes more central to HE so the aim must be to ensure that it receives the resources and scrutiny that are necessary for any mainstream form of learning. Hopefully, this in turn will benefit the fully autonomous learners who will come from outside to find a series of integrated resources and who will have the assurance that open-access learning is a central and not a marginal activity.

9. *A unique resource-based language learning system*

Ritva-Liisa Cleary *and* Lucila Makin

The Cambridge University Language Centre has pioneered a unique resource-based language learning system for the students and staff of the University. This model is now being used to establish other remote language learning units, to be connected to the central unit via the University's campus-wide optic fibre network.

The development of the language learning facilities are part of open learning and, more specifically, resource-based learning libraries must be seen within the context of a new culture in which the source of knowledge is no longer the 'teacher' and in which efficient use of educational technologies provides learners with their main learning tool.

The nature of innovation in creating the language learning resource centre is both pedagogical and technological. The following three aspects of the service are of paramount importance: (1) providing adequate user education to enable users to work in a self-access system; (2) providing appropriate information on materials and resources in the catalogue, i.e. information relevant to the learners; (3) providing guidance needed by the learners in an interactive form and at the learner's request, i.e. the Language Learning Advisory Service. New technology has been employed in the form of database programs and electronic mail facilities to widen access to the services.

Resources for language learning in the centre

The resources in the Language Centre are open to all members of the university. They have been designed to promote efficient language learning: to help users become independent learners and to enable learners to develop their own language learning strategies.

Provision in the Private Study Resource Centre

Language learning material is available in over 100 languages (see Appendix 1, p77). The collection comprises 20,500 audio and video tapes and about 4,800 volumes (including archives) and 40 periodical titles. Language learning material is available in living languages, classical/reconstructed languages (Classical Hebrew, Latin, Ancient Greek), artificial languages (Esperanto) and sign language. The more traditional audio-visual language courses are supplemented by an increasing number of printed reference material (dictionaries, grammars, specialist language books, periodicals and newspapers in foreign languages).

Direct television broadcasts by satellite are daily received in Arabic, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and Scandinavian Languages. Off-air recordings in other languages can also be made available in Dutch, Modern Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Indic languages.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs have been introduced to the Catalan, French, German, Latin and Modern Hebrew sections. Spelling checkers are available for word processing in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Swedish. The first CD-ROM application has been installed and tested, i.e. the Harraps Multilingual Dictionary; initially to run on a stand-alone station.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Bearing in mind the wide range of languages and the levels of enquiries, some division of labour has been necessary. The librarian deals with the library provision (selection, acquisition and overseeing of the physical processing of language learning material) and the input to the catalogue, while support to individual learners is provided by a human intermediary, the Language Learning Adviser.

Moreover, the learners themselves are considered a human resource. A 'Catalogue of speakers of languages other than English' at the University is compiled yearly for use by the Advisory Service. Over 50 languages are represented. Also, when new material has been acquired in the library, valuable feedback on its use and suitability is sought from both members of Language Centre and/or Language Faculties' teaching staff and also from the individual learners so as to incorporate this information in the descriptive learner catalogue.

Aims and achievements

USER EDUCATION AND SELF-ACCESS: WIDENING THE RANGE OF MODES OF INTERACTION WITH THE LEARNERS

Two modes of user education are available for induction purposes: (a) introductory sessions (individual or in groups) at specified times; (b) a specially developed self-access module called 'Square One Kit'. This contains a general information leaflet, a users' guide, an introductory video (17 min), information on the Language Learning Advisory Service, instructions for the equipment and guidance for self-assessment. Focus is on self-instructional learning. The management of the learning task is encapsulated in the mnemonic MAFIA, i.e. Motivation, Aims, Functions, Information, Activities (see Appendix 2, p78) (Harding-Esch, 1982). At any stage learners can come back to 'Square One'.

The success of this approach is apparent in the massive increase of 73% in the number of users over the past five years, while the average number of visits per user per annum, i.e. 4.3, has remained constant. In 1992 there were 4073 registered users, 1463 of which were new members. A quarter of the users were from the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty. 65% of the total registered users were undergraduates. Language learning material was used in 67 languages. A one-day user survey (November 1991) showed that 104 students used the Private Study library between 9.30am and 5.00pm. The length of the visits was: up to 1 hour 44.2%; 1-2 hours 52.9%; over 2 hours 2.9%. A visit often represents a mixture of activities based on the different media.

LEARNER-CENTRED CATALOGUE: INTERFACE WITH THE MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

A learner-centred catalogue has been developed to meet the individual learners' specific needs. User enquiries may include the following types of requests:

- Italian - an intensive course.
- Russian pronunciation exercises - beginners.
- Intermediate level reading course in German for students of music.
- Advanced Spanish for medicine - for communication.

The catalogue is being computerised using the TINlib Cataloguing and Information Retrieval Module, a software package which is also used by the British Universities Film and Video Council, London. The main aims and objectives of the project are threefold:

- To combine information that used to be held in three manual catalogues into one system. The three separate catalogues are:
    - The Master Catalogue (bibliographical information, notes on stock and archive copies).
    - The Learner-centred Catalogue contains detailed descriptions of the contents of the material. An in-house thesaurus is being created for retrieval purposes and it is possible to set up ready-made report profiles for the most commonly used searches. Searching techniques include stem search, list filter, word filter, string filter options (with Boolean operators), and free-text search facilities are also available.
    - The Tape Master Catalogue (physical description; correlation between text and tape/cassette/disk; copyright). In the multimedia system it is important for learners to know the length of each component so that they can plan their study programme accordingly.

- To provide information retrieval not only by author, title, language and subject, but also by publication type: e.g. books, audio-visual materials, journals, articles/papers (e.g. analytical documents, reviews, reports) and by medium (e.g. video recording, sound recording, computer program). In resource-based learning it is essential for the learner to be able to scan all the various materials, media and tools available to him/her.

- To create an in-house database and contribute records in machine-readable form to the Cambridge University's Union Catalogue of Books. The TINlib system permits the sharing of records and expertise within the Centre (currently in two separate buildings) through a local area network. The remote language learning units (the Judge Institute of Management Studies, and Engineering Department) will access the Centre's catalogue through the University Library's Union Catalogue.

Catalogue records are prepared according to the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (2nd ed. 1988). In addition, in order to help the learners in the process of selecting the most appropriate learning material and tools, detailed contents descriptions of materials are included: on level of difficulty, topic and linguistic coverage, approach and methodology - grammar-based or conversational, and any other special features. To date over 1000 titles (with descriptive evaluative notes) are in the database.

LANGUAGE LEARNING ADVISORY SERVICE: ROLES OF HUMAN SUPPORT

The Language Learning Advisory Service (piloted in 1981) is available to students and members of the university who want to acquire a new language or improve the one they already know (Harding and Tealby, 1981). The service aims to help learners specify their learning needs, to analyse their motivation, help them manage their learning in a way appropriate to their learning style and to achieve valid self-evaluation. It can also create in learners the feeling of belonging to a community of learners.

The Service also acts as an interactive feedback system. It gives access to the discourse of the learners, i.e. the learners' own words to represent linguistic knowledge, the learning process and language learning techniques (see Appendices 3a and 3b, pp79-80). This information helps the support staff to identify the relevant keywords for the learner catalogue and the user education programmes. This search for learner-relevant categories has been identified as the most interesting and challenging aspect of further development for resource-based learning in the Language Centre.

The Language Learning Adviser interacts with learners in two main ways: (a) face-to-face interviews and (b) through the electronic mail facilities. In 1991-92 a total of 243 users contacted the Adviser; of these 54 individuals came for a second appointment. The number of users to the Advisory Service is increasing. In 1992-93 the total number of learners reached was 413 - of these 218 came in person (45 came for a second visit), 123 used mail and 72 contacted the Adviser by electronic mail.

To foster co-operation between learners and to stress the social function of language the Adviser co-ordinates a 'bank of linguistic skills', i.e. conversation exchanges with native speakers or pairing learners with each other. A database program has been created to arrange the exchanges. In 1991-92 the total of number of learners who took part in conversation exchanges ('twinning') was 82; 21 users worked in pairs. In 1992-93 the 'twinning' scheme was used by 264 learners and 33 worked in pairs. For the 'bank of linguistic skills' the Adviser draws on individuals from both the university and the local community.

Since 1990 the Language Learning Advisory Service has organised experimental learner training courses, the syllabus of which is methodological rather than linguistic. The most successful one was an eight-session course run in the target language (French) for students at intermediate level. The aim of the courses is to increase students' awareness of themselves as learners and to identify their preferred learning strategies, to set themselves realistic objectives and take practical constraints into account. The results highlighted that this sort of training increased the range of resources used by the learners and improved their management of learning skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The Language Centre's model is a good example of the kind of library with resource-based learning which is needed in the increasingly mobile society where individuals need to learn 'how to learn' throughout their careers. Its main strengths are derived from the systematic development of a truly learner-centred approach with an appropriate support system - a development in which new educational technologies are being successfully introduced to widen and improve access and to foster autonomous modes of study, a prerequisite for flexible learning for life.

Appendix 1

LIST OF LANGUAGES

- Afrikaans
- Albanian
- Alsacian
- Amharic
- Arabic (Modern Standard, Egyptian, Iraqi, Moroccan, Saudi and Gulf)
- Armenian
- Bambara
- Basque
- Bengali
- Breton
- Bulgarian
- Burmese
- Cambodian (See Khmer)
- Cantonese
- Catalan
- Chichewa (See Nyanja)
- Chinese
- Cornish
- Corsican
- Czech
- Danish
- Dutch
- Efik
- English (See also Old English)
- Esperanto
- Faroese
- Finnish
- French
- Fula
- Gaelic (Scots Gaelic, Manx Gaelic, Irish)
- Georgian
- German
- Greek (Modern Greek, Ancient Greek)
- Gujarati
- Haitian Creole
- Hausa
- Hebrew (Modern Hebrew, Classical Hebrew)
- Hindi
- Hiri Motu
- Hungarian
- Icelandic
- Igbo
- Indonesian
- Irish
- Italian
- Japanese
- Khmer
- Korean
- Lao
- Lappish
- Latin
- Lithuanian
- Luganda
- Malay
- Maltese
- Manx (See Gaelic)
- Maori
- Marathi
- Mohawk
- Mongolian
- Nepali
- New Guinea Pidgin
- Nyanja
- Norwegian
- Occitan
- Panjabi
- Persian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Pushto
- Quechua
- Romanian
- Russian
- Sanskrit
- Serbo-Croat
- Shona
- Sinhalese
- Slovak
- Slovenian
- Somali
- Spanish
- Swahili
- Swedish
- Tamil
- Thai
- Tibetan
- Tswana (Setswana)
- Turkish
- Twi
- Ukrainian
- Urdu
- Welsh
- Xhosa
- !Xũu
- Yoruba
- Zulu

Sound recordings are also available in:

- Abaza
- Alyawarra
- Baluchi
- Brahui
- Eskimo
- Kabardian
- Kazakh
- Kurdish
- Mauritian Creole
- Ossetic
- Samoan
- Ubykh
- Vietnamese
- West Indian Patois
- Zaza

The Linguistics section includes material in Phonetics, Language Teaching and Sociolinguistics. There are also dictionaries and video courses for learning British Sign Language and Lipreading.

Appendix 2

University of Cambridge Language Centre

Need analysis questionnaire - **MAFIA**

M	**Motivation** What is your attitude towards the community whose language you want to learn? How important is it for you to succeed? Do you need to learn the language to be able to achieve certain specific tasks or do you want to learn enough to be accepted as a member of the foreign community?
A	**Aims** What do you want to be able to do in the language? Do you want to communicate in the written or the spoken language? or both? Will it be enough if you just understand the language (at least in the first instance)? For you, is it sufficient to learn just enough language for communication to occur?
F	**Functions** What use will you be making of the language? What kind of situations will you have to perform in? (telephone? lectures? seminars? shops?) What functions of language will you primarily need? (explaining, persuading, seeking information, contradicting, etc) What will your relationship be with the people you will be dealing with? (friends, inferiors, superiors, etc)
I	**Information** What kind of linguistic information do you need to meet your needs? Which are the most important: technical vocabulary? the precise meaning of intonation? correct pronunciation? a set of ready-made sentences to get by with?
A	**Activities** Can you list the language learning activities you think would help you attain your aims while being realistic about the constraints under which you are working? Can you make a list of the activities you can carry out in the Language Centre? Is it going to be the whole of your language learning plan? Have you thought of working with another learner or meeting a native speaker of the language you are learning? or perhaps reading foreign newspapers - or watching films with subtitles in College? What about joining a Language Society or planning a holiday or language course abroad?

Appendix 3a

LANGUAGE LEARNING ADVISORY SERVICE

Before visiting the Language Adviser, go to the Private Study Facilities in the Lecture Block and have a look at the material available. Then fill in this questionnaire and bring it with you to the interview.

Part 1

1 Have you studied the language before or learnt it in any way? YES ( ) NO ( )
2 What have you done and how long ago?

3 What activities do you expect to carry out in the foreign language?
For example, are you going to:
( ) visit the country as a tourist?
( ) do fieldwork?
( ) speak to native speakers in an academic environment?
( ) speak to native speakers in a rural environment?
( ) give a talk?
( ) read material connected with your research?
( ) write reports in the language?
( ) attend lectures/conferences?
( ) others? ______

4 State the activities that you can already manage and the ones you are less confident in.

5 If possible state a concrete objective, i.e. 'I would like to be able to read weeklies in German', 'I want to be able to understand French spoken at normal speed', 'I want to talk to the women in a village in ...' etc.

Part 2 - Drawing up a language learning plan

1 For how long are you going to study the language?

2 How much time do you intend to devote to language learning per week?

3 How much time do you intend to devote to language learning in a very busy week?

4 How are you going to keep a record of what you are doing?

5 Would you like to be put in contact with another learner?

6 Would you like to meet a native speaker to practise the language?

7 After your visit to the Private Study Laboratory and bearing in mind the material available:
How are you going to learn? Would you choose to do any of these:
( ) watch television?
( ) listen to tapes?
( ) talk?
( ) write what you have learnt?
( ) look up words in the dictionary and expand your vocabulary?
( ) learn the grammar rules and do grammar exercises?

8 Can you explain why you have made that choice?

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Appendix 3b

LANGUAGE LEARNING ADVISORY SERVICE

Before your second visit to the Language Adviser answer these questions and bring them with you to the meeting.

1 If you are working in the Private Study Facilities, what main material have you used? Specify.

2 Have you used other material for revision?
( ) to complement your work?
( ) for the sake of variety?
( ) other reasons? Specify.

3 Have you studied outside the Private Study Laboratory? Specify.

4 Have you kept to the programme you drew up for your work at the start?

5 How have you kept a record of what you have been doing?

6 Are you satisfied with the progress you have made up to now?

7 How has the experience of working on your own been?

8 Have you tried any kind of pairing with other learners?

9 Have you met a native speaker to practise the language?

Your revised language learning plan:

References in Section 3

Chapter 8 - From continuing to higher education - Anne Ife

Esch E M, 'The open access sound and video library of the University of Cambridge: progress report and development', *System*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp13-28 (1982)

Esch E M and A Tealby, 'Counselling for language learning at the University of Cambridge: progress report on an experiment', *Mélanges Pédagogiques*, pp95-120 (1981)

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Learner support systems

In Section 2, an interactional view of language learning was proposed as a framework for developing appropriate learner support systems working in self-access centres.

This section is about the nitty-gritty of developing systems based on interaction with - or indeed between - learners. They all rely on making individuals talk or write about their language learning experience (see Section 1) to help them improve the management of their own language learning. They are all developing systems and very much 'in the making'.

The first is a distance language learning advisory service managed by electronic mail. This experiment, started at Cambridge by Lucila Makin in 1993 to help users overcome problems of physical access, has proved very successful quantitatively. The report is a first attempt at a qualitative analysis, looking at how students' messages display their beliefs about language learning. The process whereby the adviser interprets the messages and acts upon them is analysed.

Self-access presupposes the existence of information retrieval systems able to analyse and interpret learners' search criteria and to incorporate them into their thesaurus. Both Liisa Cleary and Sam Cembalo - using different software - deal with learner support in the domain of cataloguing language learning materials and the provision of information retrieval systems for self-access. Liisa Cleary also addresses the fundamental issue of the way both learner requirements and institutional requirements need to be kept in mind in thesaurus construction.

Lastly, Danièle Abé describes how learner-support was conceived and implemented in the context of a resource centre on one of the industrial sites of a major French car manufacturer in France. Two points need to be made here: one is the complementarity of the various means aiming at learner support in the overall learning environment, the other one is the range of evaluation measures selected and the extremely useful discussion of the efficiency of the system.

Suggested readers' guide

This section on learner support systems for self-access language learning gives readers a good idea of the kind of practical issues self-access leads to.

Access point

This section is the recommended access point for librarians under pressure of time.

Suggested follow-up

- *Teachers/advisers*
  In industry: Chapter 13 will be of particular interest.

  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  If you have come here from Section 2, for practical examples illustrating the issues raised in Section 2, you may want to read chapter 10 and then go on to chapter 9 in Section 3. If you have come here from chapter 9 in Section 3, you could go on to case studies: chapter 8 in Section 3 and also Sections 5 and 6.

  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  See Section 6 (ch 17 and 20) for practical examples illustrating the points raised in Section 2 (ch 4) and Section 4.

- *Policy makers*
  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  In industry: Chapter 13 will be of particular interest.

- *Librarians*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  Self-access in practice: chapter 12 and Section 6 (ch 19).
  In industry: Chapter 12 in this section will be of particular interest.

  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  For further discussion of relevant issues see Sections 2, 3 and 5.

10. *Learner telesupport: language advising by e-mail*

Lucila Makin

Members of the University of Cambridge wishing to acquire a new language or improve one they already have, can do this by self-direction, using the private study facilities of the Language Centre. Up to 1992, language advising was carried out only in face-to-face interviews. Since e-mail is increasingly being used from undergraduates to research and teaching staff, the Language Learning Adviser decided to initiate e-mail language advising from October 1993 with the aim of promoting and increasing access to the service. The following consists firstly of a brief characterisation of the expected advantages of offering advising by e-mail over and above face-to-face advising from the point of view of the overall management of the service. Secondly, those pedagogical aspects of the advising which are likely to be enhanced by the introduction of e-mail advising will be outlined. Finally, a brief analysis of examples from students' messages will illustrate the way in which learners view the service and the way in which the adviser operates to provide support to learners.

Advantages of introducing e-mail from the point of view of the management of the service

Increased perceived availability of the Advisory Service to users

Electronic mail is an excellent means of making it clear to learners that all requests are welcome and no question is silly if it is genuine. It is reassuringly appropriate - quiet, private and no-fuss - for learners who may think their request is trivial and might feel embarrassed to write a letter or make an appointment. This should be reflected in a substantial increase in the number of users, those who would not think it worthwhile to use the service otherwise, and in the numbers of requests, but more likely in the range of types of requests. Since many requests are likely to be of a straightforward 'request for information type' this should go along with a big improvement in the cost-effectiveness of the service as the face-to-face interviews will become associated with problems which can only be dealt with face-to-face while the most frequent requests can be responded to by 'ready-made' answers.

Improved physical access

Electronic mail is more or less available 24 hours a day throughout the University, both colleges and departments. This, de facto, is likely to increase massively the number of users making use of the system and is in sharp contrast with the difficulties users may have finding the advisory service simply because they are on the wrong site or have seminars when it is open, etc. Of particular interest for language learning, e-mail provides access to people throughout the world and without senders having to worry about time differences between countries.

Improved reliability and efficiency

E-mail does a lot of office work and management for the Adviser. It more or less guarantees that messages will not get lost, that there will be no confusion concerning addressees and both parties know that nobody will interfere.

Users know that an e-mail message will always reach the Adviser. There are exchanges between both parties, regardless of place and time (messages come and go at any time of day and night). Moreover, the system does a lot of monitoring for you - such as recording the time when messages have been sent - and gives you useful feedback. Information sent through e-mail will be kept in a file until the receiver decides to delete it (it will not get lost on the desk). If a message has not been read after a time, the sender will be informed by the system that the receiver is not checking e-mail. Even supposing human advisers took it in turn to be available for face-to-face interviews throughout the week, they would need a secretary working full-time for them to obtain this level of reliability. The introduction of advising by e-mail should be associated with the availability of much better and accurate feedback for management purposes.

In this section we have considered the advantages which were related to the management of the advisory service as a whole. In the following section we consider those advantages which are more directly associated with the outcome of the language advising process in terms of self-management of the learning task.

Expected pedagogical advantages

REQUIREMENT OF THOUGHT-THROUGH MESSAGES, WRITTEN MESSAGES AND DELAYED COMMUNICATION

When using e-mail learners are more likely to think out the main points they must include in the messages to the Adviser and this ensures that learners, simply by virtue of typing their first message, start organising themselves and doing some sort of forward planning. The fact that people do not normally bother to edit their e-mail messages means that learners' first messages display what their priorities are, i.e. what is foremost in their mind as an issue. What they just forgot to ask will be included in the next e-mail. The Adviser has time to analyse the request and plan answers. The relative predictability of some of the requests allows for the creation of a bank of information and reply messages. This enables the Adviser to concentrate on learners' more specific needs and wants. The messages that have been gathered are a concrete proof of the sort of information users need and this helps with the planning of dissemination of information. It must be noted however that there may be learners for whom this characteristic of e-mail communication is not an advantage, for example because they have writing difficulties, which is an argument for maintaining the range of modes of advising.

CREATION OF A CO-OPERATIVE NETWORK OF LEARNERS

One of the main advantages of initiating advising for language learning by e-mail is that it brings the users out of their isolation. The existence of the service by itself makes appear a community of learners, students, staff, researchers, who are all linked by the fact that they are somehow involved in the process of language learning and interested in languages. Naturally, any member of that community can make use of the network as a language learning resource or as a support system. The Adviser can also make use of this network to put people in touch and it opens up a lot of very useful possibilities. Networks of students learning each other's language can be organised so that they support each other and thus re-invent for themselves the old system of the penfriend. Evidence for the existence of the network of users filling in this function and giving users the sense of 'belonging' to a community should come from the messages of the users and an increased number of requests for getting in touch with other users working on the same language and/or with speakers of the language one is learning.

FEEDBACK AND COLLECTION OF RELIABLE RESEARCH DATA

All the messages, received and sent, can be printed and kept. They can be stored according to language, and ordered alphabetically according to user identifiers (these have to be protected, obviously). What is interesting is that the messages can be used as research data and these data remain unmodified by the research. This is an advantage over the use of a tape-recorder or an observer in an interview that will always affect the behaviour of the participants.

The knowledge expected to be gained is as follows:

- from the learner's messages:
  - the nature of the expectations the learners have, the way they think about language and learning;
  - the amount of information learners assume to be sufficient for the Adviser to answer their requests.

- from the Adviser's messages:
  - the ability of the Adviser to interpret the learners' needs and wants with the information provided: how it is done intuitively, how it can be evaluated and how successful strategies could be modelled;
  - the ability to send clear, factual information that is at the same time sufficiently personalised;
  - the ability to advise without being prescriptive;
  - the ability to keep in contact without being intrusive.

To sum up, the expected advantages of the use of e-mail for the language learning advisory service are: many more learners - whether shy, busy and far away - are reached about a much wider range of problems. Both Adviser and learners save time, the communication system is very reliable, messages are safely and systematically stored, requests and replies are thought out. Reliable information for feedback and research data are gathered.

The Adviser's functions are:
- to impart factual information when requested;
- help learners organise themselves, set their own targets and monitor their own progress;
- help learners recover their enthusiasm when it is flagging and break the sense of isolation that can develop when working on their own.

The aim of the interaction between the Adviser and the learners is to try to help them overcome the consequences of all the factors which may affect the learners' management of their own learning and their attitudes. For two out of these three functions, it is expected that e-mail will improve things dramatically. It will reduce the costs of imparting information and it will help exploit the community of learners both as a linguistic resource and for human support. It is much more difficult to predict what effect e-mail communication will have on the quality of the advising. (Note that the concept of advising here is essentially methodological and in particular, it is not at all a 'help-desk' whose aim would be to advise people as they are working on materials.) In the following section, a first analysis of e-mail advising messages is given essentially for the purpose of illustrating how the advising function is carried out.

ANALYSIS OF THE MESSAGES: PRESENTATION

Learners' messages

The Adviser has a number of criteria to analyse learners' requests in face-to-face interviews. These same criteria are used to analyse the e-mail written messages systematically. In both cases, sources of information to interpret the learners' messages are very different, while the editor needs to answer the following questions:

- Does the learner know what he/she wants to learn?
- Can he/she identify his/her needs?
- Does he/she know the size of the enterprise he/she is undertaking?
- Is he/she making a realistic commitment?
- How important is it for him/her to succeed?
- If messages are not sufficiently clear, are his/her ideas also unclear?
- Does he/she know how to communicate?

Adviser's messages

The Adviser's messages have to be specific, containing factual information, but cannot be prescriptive on other spheres. Learners have to be helped to become aware of the work involved in achieving a certain level and to set for themselves clear, attainable targets. The learners themselves have to decide how to manage their time and how important it is for them to succeed in attaining their language learning goals. To find out about learners' progress and lend support, the right time has to be found to send a message, the correct words have to be chosen so as not to be an intrusion.

The messages have to be short, we think ideally not longer than a screen. If longer, they become uncomfortable to handle. This is a constraint e-mail has and it must not be ignored. Long messages can be printed out but run the risk of never being read. Long questionnaires will never be answered. The problem of length can only be overcome by developing a relationship in which short messages are exchanged, dealing with one point at a time. Besides you are more likely to get better replies if fewer questions are made, and to have the advice heeded if it is not overwhelming. On the other hand, this constraint may turn out to be very unsuitable for certain types of learner problems. Identifying types of problems - or types of learners - where e-mail communication does not work and where face-to-face interviews should be arranged at the outset is one of our research aims.

Information on the data

The data was collected from October 1992 to June 1993, i.e. 24 weeks that make up the three university terms and amounting to the first year of operation. At the beginning of the academic year 1992/93 an announcement was inserted in the newsletter of the Computer Department. The newsletter is available both on-line on the network and in printed form to users who subscribe to it. The announcement was repeated in the University Reporter and is included in the Language Centre information leaflet.

The users are members of the university - undergraduates, postgraduates and staff - who communicate with the Adviser. There have been 64 users and 321 exchanges. This is approximately a fifth of the users of the Advisory Service, 210 have come in person.

The data used comprises all e-mail messages received and sent. For the purpose of this report, the 64 users have been divided among:

- the 24 learners who made the first contact by e-mail to ask for advice on about how to learn a language,
- the 12 learners who made the first contact by e-mail to ask for conversation exchanges,
- the 28 learners who continued a communication which had been started by other means, i.e. in person, by mail, by phone.

This section firstly presents a number of examples of messages and gives a gloss of how they are interpreted. Secondly, it describes the way in which all users have organised the messages and the information included and requested. It also looks at the Adviser's replies and at the subsequent exchanges.

Examples of messages

> SUBJECT: SPANISH
>
> DEAR DR. X,
>
> I AM A GERMAN GRADUATE WHO WANTS TO START LEARNING SPANISH. AS I KNOW GERMAN, ENGLISH AND A LITTLE FRENCH AND IN PARTICULAR AS I HAVE DONE 8 YEARS OF LATIN AT SCHOOL I AM LOOKING FOR A SYSTEMATIC COURSE WHICH INCLUDES PRECISE GRAMMATICAL EXPLANATIONS RATHER THAN A COURSE WHICH IS INTENDED FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER LEARNED A FOREIGN LANGUAGE BEFORE. COULD YOU PLEASE ADVISE ME ON THIS? THANKS A LOT.
>
> YOURS SINCERELY,

This learner has sent a perfect message: he gives a summary of his linguistic background. He knows the way in which he likes to learn. It is easy to direct him to a specific type of material. He knows what he wants and only needs the reference. Not all learners are so clear about what they want to do and their messages need clarification.

> SUBJECT: SPANISH
>
> DEAR DR. X
>
> I WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE MY SPANISH AND WAS WONDERING HOW I CAN REGISTER WITH THE LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT TO

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

USE THE FACILITIES AT THE SIDGWICK SITE. I DON' T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT WHAT IS AVAILABLE. ARE THERE ANY TAUGHT COURSES THAT I COULD JOIN NEXT TERM? CAN I STILL APPLY BEING A POST-GRADUATE?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

This learner has vague ideas of what is available in the Language Centre, she is not even sure if she can use it. Since she is sounding the waters, she has not thought of including information about either herself or her aims. A person with such vague expectations is unlikely to come to the Advisory Service in person.

SUBJECT: SPANISH

THE PRIVATE STUDY FACILITIES OF THE LANGUAGE CENTRE ARE AVAILABLE TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY. LET ME KNOW YOUR COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENT AND YOU WILL RECEIVE A LEAFLET THROUGH UMS.

ALSO. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS PLEASE. SO I CAN ADVISE YOU ON HOW TO GO ABOUT YOUR LEARNING.

- FOR HOW LONG HAVE YOU STUDIED SPANISH BEFORE OR LEARNT IT IN ANY WAY?
- HOW LONG AGO?
- DO YOU EXPECT TO CARRY OUT ANY SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES IN SPANISH IN THE NEAR FUTURE? (FOR EXAMPLE. VISIT THE COUNTRY. READ SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS. ATTEND LECTURES/CONFERENCES) OR ARE YOU DOING IT FOR YOUR OWN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT?

In her reply, the Adviser provides information about what the learner is entitled to and asks her for her current level and needs.

SUBJECT: SPANISH

DEAR DR. X.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR REPLY. HERE ARE THE DETAILS THAT YOU REQUESTED:

XXX XXX. XXX COLLEGE. DEPARTMENT OF XXX.

I STARTED TO LEARN SPANISH AT O LEVEL AND HAVEN' T DONE ANY FORMAL LEARNING SINCE THEN ... (1986). HOWEVER. I SPENT 2 MONTHS IN VENEZUELA THE SUMMER

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> BEFORE LAST AND MANAGED TO BRING MY SPANISH UP TO A ROUGH WORKING LEVEL AGAIN. THE MAIN PROBLEM I HAVE IS LACK OF PRACTICE AND VOCABULARY.
>
> I AM INTERESTED IN REVIVING MY SPANISH BEFORE A TRIP TO MADRID AT EASTER. BUT ON A LONG-TERM VIEW. I WOULD LIKE TO WORK OUT IN SPAIN OR SOUTH AMERICA IN THE FUTURE.
>
> I HOPE THIS IS OF SOME HELP.

In her first message the learner has been far too vague for the Adviser to give any suitable advice. In her second message, however, she has not only given the information required but more about her immediate and later plans. With the idea of level she gives and what she intends to do with the language it is possible to suggest to her the appropriate course of action.

Some time after the first exchanges the Adviser sends messages to ask learners about their progress. Messages here lend themselves to more a personalised approach. A word in the appropriate language is included whenever possible.

> SUBJECT: GERMAN
>
> WI GEHT ES IHNEN?
>
> HOW ARE THINGS GOING?
>
> PLEASE. LET ME KNOW.

> SUBJECT: GERMAN
>
> DEAR DR X
>
> THANK YOU FOR YOUR E-MAIL. I AM AFRAID THINGS ARE GOING VERY SLOWLY AS FAR AS LEARNING GERMAN IS CONCERNED. THE ONLY THING I AM DOING AT THE MOMENT IS LISTENING TO GERMAN PROGRAMMES ON SATELLITE TV. I FEEL SOME BENEFIT. I AM NOT DOING ANY THING REGARDING GRAMMAR ETC. HOWEVER. I CAN CORRECT YOUR SENTENCE THAT THE WORD 'HOW' IN GERMAN IS 'WIE' AND NOT 'WI' !!
>
> THANK YOU AGAIN FOR ASKING.

The learner has received the messages as it was intended: a support for his learning - not an intrusion. He gives a summary of his work, makes a joke about the Adviser's use of German and thanks her for her interest. Although short, the message is revealing. The learner is putting less time into learning German than he intended. He feels that what he is doing is not good enough. Probably his history

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makes him believe that the only 'proper' way to learn is to do the grammar. If he does not value watching TV he might abandon it completely. The word 'only' is very significant so it is taken up by the Adviser.

SUBJECT: GERMAN

WHAT'S THIS OF 'THE 'ONLY' THING I'M DOING'? YOU ARE WATCHING GERMAN TV AND THAT IS GOOD. IT HELPS YOU TO KEEP IT UP. TO UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT ACCENTS AND TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE COUNTRY. SO BE POSITIVE!!

IF YOU GO INTO THE LANGUAGE CENTRE TO WATCH TV. EVERY NOW AND THEN. YOU SHOULD HAVE A GO AT THE TUCO PROGRAM IN THE COMPUTER IN LAB3. IT IS MAINLY A GRAMMAR PROGRAM.

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE CONVERSATION EXCHANGES WITH THE TWO GERMAN STUDENTS? DID THAT WORK?

KEEP IN TOUCH!

PS: I' VE MADE A NOTE OF THE 'WIE' FOR THE NEXT MESSAGE.

The Adviser's message tries to boost the learner's morale, showing that what he is doing is important. In this learner's mind, television equals entertainment and not serious work. He has to realise that exposure to the language as spoken by native speakers is a vital ingredient of language learning. Then, since the learner has a concern with grammar the Adviser suggests the computer program. The learner does not seem to have much time in his hands to do more systematic work. The computer program might just do the trick. Before closing the message, the Adviser enquires about previous plans. The learner will realise the Adviser knows who he is. If the opening message was a personalised circular for all learners of German, that is not the case in subsequent exchanges. Asking a question at the end of the message, also, aims at leaving it open for the learner to get in touch again. The message ends taking up the joke which has been started by the learner.

Another learner replies to the Adviser's enquiry, which again has been well received. The learner admits having problems since learning by self-direction is not easy:

SUBJECT: GERMAN

I AM AFRAID I FIND LEARNING GERMAN VERY HARD. I AM NOT A VERY ORGANISED PERSON AND I DON'T LEARN IT SYSTEMATICALLY. BUT I HOPE TO BE MORE ORGANISED AS FROM THE SUMMER.

THANKS FOR YOUR EMAIL.

The message gives clues of where the problem lies for the Adviser to focus her reply:

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SUBJECT: GERMAN

YOU HAVE ALREADY REALISED WHICH IS YOUR WEAK POINT: TIME-MANAGEMENT. LOOK AT YOUR PRESENT COMMITMENTS AND FIND THREE SLOTS AT REGULAR INTERVALS WHEN YOU CAN DO SOME GERMAN. BE REALISTIC BUT STICK TO THAT TIME-TABLE. IT IS UNLIKELY YOU ARE GOING TO BE AGAIN IN A PLACE WHERE THERE ARE SO MANY FACILITIES AND YOU MUST NOT LET THIS OPPORTUNITY GO BY. IF TO KNOW GERMAN IS IMPORTANT, TO MANAGE TIME IS CRUCIAL.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The Adviser replies highlighting what the learner sees as her problem: time management. Then the Adviser makes specific recommendations about how to tackle the problem, warns the learner about the danger of letting this golden opportunity go by and links the learning of a language with learning a transferable skill which is even more important. The question at the ends aims at continuing the communication.

Another of the learners contacted has been more successful.

SUBJECT: TURKISH AND SPANISH

I WILL SOON FINISH PASO DOBLE (SP CP) HAVING ALREADY COMPLETED MEXICO VIVO (SP CQ). DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE NEXT COURSE I COULD TRY?

I INTEND TO START TURKISH NEXT WEEK, AND TRY AND DO IT FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR TWICE A WEEK.

YOURS,

This learner reports on the work done up to now, wants a concrete suggestion of material to continue and describes his future plans including the timetable. The message evidences a disciplined well-organised learner who has managed to make good progress.

SUBJECT: TURKISH AND SPANISH

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE PROGRESS AND STEADY WORK!!!

HAVE A LOOK AT MASTERING SPANISH II SP CS. ALSO CHECK VARIEDADES DEL ESPAÑOL ACTUAL SP CC. THIS MIGHT BE A BIT DIFFICULT. IT IS AN INTERESTING BOOK AND YOU CAN DO SOME SECTIONS. ALL THE UNITS HAVE THE SAME LEVEL. IN

THE MODULE SECTION CHECK SP M 24 A/B 'SPANISH LANGUAGE IN AMERICA'. I HAVE A FEELING IT IS IN ENGLISH BUT YOU MIGHT FIND IT INTERESTING. TELEJOURNAL SP M 23 E AND F ARE CLIPPINGS FROM LATIN-AMERICAN NEWS. THEY HAVE A TRANSCRIPT AND SOME EXERCISES AT THE END. THESE TWO ARE VIDEOS.

BUENA SUERTE AND KEEP ME INFORMED.

The Adviser starts by congratulating him. By previous messages she knows he is interested in Latin America and suggests appropriate material. There is no suitable question to ask here so the message ends with a request to keep in touch.

Here there are messages of another type:

SUBJECT: SPANISH

THERE IS A PERSON INTERESTED IN SPANISH/ENGLISH CONVERSATION EXCHANGE. WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET HER?

PLEASE LET ME KNOW.

SUBJECT: SPANISH

THANKS FOR GETTING IN TOUCH - YES I WOULD. I WILL ONLY BE IN CAMBRIDGE UNTIL END OF JUNE/EARLY JULY, HOWEVER.

SUBJECT: SPANISH

XXX WANTS TO EXCHANGE SPANISH/ENGLISH CONVERSATION. SHE IS LEARNING ENGLISH AT XXX. IF YOU ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO MEET THIS STUDENT, LET ME KNOW SO I CAN ARRANGE TWINNING WITH SOMEBODY ELSE. KEEP ME INFORMED ABOUT HOW THE EXCHANGE IS GOING.

GOOD LUCK!

These three exchanges could be described as bureaucratic: an offer of a conversation exchange accepted and formalised. However they have had a function. The learner, busy with her main field of research did not find the time to request a new conversation exchange. The e-mail, however, has put her again in motion and she will restart the language practice.

> SUBJECT: GERMAN
>
> ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RENEWING YOUR GERMAN/ENGLISH CONVERSATION EXCHANGE. PLEASE LET ME KNOW.

> SUBJECT: GERMAN
>
> THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE EMAIL THE OTHER DAY. I AM JUST ABOUT TO GO AWAY TO A CONFERENCE, AND WILL SHORTLY AFTERWARDS BE GOING TO THE PRIEN GOETHE INSTITUT COURSE ON A DAAD SCHOLARSHIP, SO I WOULD NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR CONVERSATION EXCHANGE. NEXT TERM I WOULD PROBABLY BE INTERESTED, HOWEVER.
> THANK YOU.

> SUBJECT: GERMAN
>
> GOOD LUCK IN THE CONFERENCE AND IN THE GERMAN COURSE. CONTACT ME WHEN YOU ARE BACK SO THAT I CAN PUT YOU IN CONTACT WITH SOMEBODY FOR A CONVERSATION EXCHANGE.

This contact has achieved a limited result in so far as the learner cannot accept the offer of a conversation exchange. He has provided, however, important information about the state of his language programme and has signalled that he should be contacted next term.

Messages on the same topic but this time initiated by the learner:

> SUBJECT: ITALIAN CONVERSATION EXCHANGE
>
> HELLO AGAIN. IN JANUARY, YOU FIXED ME UP WITH AN ITALIAN SPEAKING SWISS CALLED XXX TO EXCHANGE CONVERSATION. UNFORTUNATELY, XXX HAS GONE BACK TO XXX AND I WOULD BE VERY APPRECIATIVE IF YOU COULD FIND SOMEBODY ELSE FOR ME. I FOUND IT ESPECIALLY USEFUL BEING ABLE TO ASK A NATIVE-SPEAKER ABOUT HOW COMMON CERTAIN WORDS OR PHRASES WERE IN THE SPOKEN LANGUAGE, AS IT IS USUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL FROM READING TEXTS.

```
MY ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER ARE: XXX.
IF THERE ARE ANY FEMALE ITALIANS OUT THERE, THAT WOULD
BE NICE BUT I' M KEEN TO FIND SOMEONE SINCE MY
'CERTIFICATE' ORAL EXAM IS ONLY 4 WEEKS AWAY !!!!
THANKS ....
```

The learner acknowledges the services received previously, pointing to the value he sees in what he has been doing. He includes all his personal information and states a preference. However he also makes clear the urgency of the request.

```
SUBJECT: ITALIAN CONVERSATION EXCHANGE
MADE TO MEASURE!
AN ITALIAN GIRL, AGE 21, READY FOR YOU.
HER NAME IS XXX. SHE IS STUDYING AT XXX.
```

```
SUBJECT: ITALIAN CONVERSATION EXCHANGE
YOU' RE TOO KIND. THANKS!!! I'LL LET YOU KNOW HOW IT
GOES....
```

The Adviser replies in the same informal manner in which the learner has made the request.

Some comments and results

The offer of contacting the Advisory Service by e-mail has been taken up by University members and its introduction coincided with an increase of 45.5% in the use of the service. There is no way of knowing if these users would have come in person if the service had not been available by e-mail but, by and large, it seems that the predicted advantages from the point of view of the management of the system (see p83) are effectively working as expected. Generally, widening the range of modes of communication with users proves to effectively increase access and to improve efficiency. More specifically, what seems to happen is that modes of access to the service are associated with different types of needs. Face-to-face interviews are associated with learning difficulties, task-management and/or self-evaluation. Further interviews follow in about 20% of cases. Letters are associated with requests for twinnings for conversation exchanges or pairings with other learners. E-mail triggers not only more but more frequent messages than the other modes of communication.

Interactional aspects seem to open up a whole new field of research. E-mail is developing its own rules for communication. Users expect an immediate response, even if it is only an acknowledgement. Otherwise, there is a feeling that the receiver might not be checking the e-mail regularly.* In other words, the delay in replying is assigned meanings in the same way as a pause in a conversation. If it is long, or longer than expected, negative inferences of non-co-operation will be raised. This has consequences for the operation of the advising service. Answers have to be sent immediately to create the feeling of having listened and being ready to help. Even when there is no immediate reply to give, the message has to be acknowledged and a promise to come back with further information has to be made.

Advising by e-mail is showing an advantage over face-to-face advising because it makes it easier for the Adviser to maintain contact with the learners in a friendly non-interfering way. Making a visit to the Advisory Service is in no way a requisite to use the facilities of the Centre. On the contrary, learners are invited to come only if they have a difficulty and have already thought about it. Learners who do come are encouraged to continue coming to further discuss their progress and learning plans but it is up to them to make the move. E-mail communication, in contrast, appears to have been successful in breaking the isolation of people working on their own. It is hoped that our planned analysis of the way users' messages are phrased will reveal that users 'imagine' the Adviser to be a young, friendly and competent person (i.e. presumably, somebody like them!).

Another advantage of e-mail over other means of communication (in our Centre) is that standard messages from the bank sent by the Adviser are personalised in a way that messages sent by other means are not.

The analysis of the data gathered so far sheds some light on what learners expect of the Advisory Service.

- The majority want information on how to go about learning a language, material available, possibilities of joining a class, or meeting a native speaker.
- The miscellaneous requests that reach the Advisory Service show that users also see it as a meeting point to gather and distribute information about other countries and cultures.
- Learners think that in order to be advised effectively the Adviser needs to know their current level of knowledge.
- What they are going to do with the language and how long they have to learn it does not seem so important to them. Only half of them mention the latter in their messages.
- The greater discrepancy between what the learners and Adviser think important to discuss concerns a concrete timetable to do the work. The learners do not mention time allocation. This seems to suggest that they believe that they will find the time somehow. It is the Adviser's belief that during the course of the e-mail interaction learners should be encouraged to spell out what they intend to do. The actual typing out of the messages seems to force the learners to think out some kind of learning plan and to make some sort of commitment with

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* I realised this early enough. A user sent me a message requesting a Hungarian speaker for a conversation exchange. Since there are not very many Hungarians in Cambridge, the search took me several days. In the meantime, the user came to the Advisory Service in person. He thought I might not have checked the e-mail.

themselves. Sending the message to the Adviser - pressing the key 'send' - gives greater strength to the commitments.

- No reliable independent source to judge the Adviser's messages was arranged. This would require that the learners are interviewed or questioned independently. The provision of factual information is standardised and leaves little room for error. The analysis of messages, however, facilitates the development of a technique to identify problems. It seems that to formulate advice more effectively messages have to use the language of the addressee. Thus linguistic accommodation starts from what the latter sees as problems.

It is hoped that in the future more contacts can be made to check the success or failure of the language programmes undertaken by learners. A further development has to be communication between learners, which is already taking place but on a very small scale. The aim is for learners to share their experience and give each other support. The possibility of international communication between learners is at present being explored.

Conclusion

E-mail communication is seen in this paper in the context of language advising, but experience suggests that advising in a broader sense can use this form of communication. For instance, to lend support to learners in environments where there is no frequent contact with a tutor. Furthermore, e-mail in the form of a 'learning conversation' seems an appropriate means of supporting and supplementing any type of learning activity within a complex organisation, governmental, commercial or educational and research-oriented.

The main aim of the Language Centre, to give guidance on how to learn a language by self-direction, can be attained using e-mail. Contact with the Adviser has been progressed with the use of e-mail. It seems also possible to accomplish its underlying aims, i.e. to help to develop transferable skills of learning by self-direction and managing time. The use of e-mail points to the possibility of creating a sense of belonging to a community of learners. All signs are that demand is going to increase and further careful research on e-mail language advising must be carried out as soon as possible.

11. *Learners' search criteria and cataloguing language learning material: demands imposed on databases*

Ritva-Liisa Cleary

It is widely recognised that language learners' enquiries range across a wide spectrum, from a general enquiry to a highly specialist one. Yet very little literature exists on the ways catalogues are searched and how catalogues can cope with end-users' requests for information. Barrett (1993), I think rightly, points out that 'it is surprising how few self-access facilities use a database system to organise their materials'. While it is now becoming more common for organisations to create their own information servers (e.g. via Gopher or the World Wide Web), it still seems difficult to trace information in catalogues on material that yields relevant information to language learners. Why is this? What is missing in the traditional bibliographic catalogues?

This article addresses two questions: 'what are the requirements imposed by learners on catalogues in a self-access system?' and 'how can those requirements be tackled?'. I draw partly on personal observations made during enquiry desk duty, feedback received from the Language Learning Adviser; and partly on two experiential sessions organised during the two-day self-access conference. The main aim of the experiential sessions was to elicit the learner's ideas, words and criteria when searching catalogues of language learning materials. The findings are then summarised and compared with the ways in which language learning material is organised in the Language Centre's own in-house TINlib cataloguing and information retrieval system. I should stress that the comparison was not part of the experiential sessions (even though copies of TINLib records were distributed to participants). The latter part of the article examines some of the demands and implications of a controlled vocabulary approach as compared to a free text approach. Facilities combining controlled language (thesaurus) and natural language facilities (free text) is found an exciting development and a way forward for searching in self-access systems.

Experiential sessions

The exercises to elicit learners' ideas were chosen from three European languages (French, German and Modern Greek). The participants were divided into three groups, each group on a given learning situation, as follows:

Group 1 - You are a research worker in the Faculty of Anthropology and will be participating in a dig in Greece in six months time. The majority of your colleagues will be Greek.

Group 2 - You are a student of musicology and need to study and consult some of the untranslated writings of Haydn. The documents will be available for your use in a month's time.

Group 3 - You are a business consultant for a group of architects. You regularly have to represent the company and its on-going projects in conferences in French. You feel that you need to improve your pronunciation.

Participants were asked initially to think for themselves and write down their own keywords; afterwards they discussed their criteria in groups and presented their 'agreed' list of terms to the main group. Because of time constraints and other control factors (e.g. familiarity/non-familiarity with the system) it was necessary to limit the sessions to hypothetical learning situations; there was no printed thesaurus, learning material, or access to an on-line database available.

SUMMARY OF THE EXPERIENTIAL SESSIONS

The following observations summarise some of the features identified by the groups. The notes are not intended to be exhaustive, but sufficiently highlight the range of terms used.

Modern Greek - The learner requirements: practical/survival knowledge of Modern Greek, e.g. alphabets; the four language skills - reading, writing, speaking, listening skills - computer keyboard skills; some cultural and geographical information as well as maps, atlases and travel guides.

German for musicology student - The learner requirements: a text-based approach, with emphasis on skills of text analysis, grammar and translation; with some knowledge or interpretation of handwriting and notation.

French pronunciation - The learner requirements: intermediate French, business French, with pronunciation, intonation, accent; possibly a specialist/intensive course.

It was interesting to note that longish lists of features/terms were given, but less attention was paid to semantic groupings (e.g. synonyms or near-synonyms). Overall, a good range of terms emerged - from the communicative needs to the more text-based - even though experiential sessions of this sort are more successful when practical tools are at hand (e.g. thesauri, familiarisation or prior knowledge of a thesaurus/classification system). Another revealing piece of feedback was that a high number of the participants were either dissatisfied with or too modest about their current cataloguing and classification procedures.

An overview of cataloguing systems (manual and automated), learner search 'paths' and the maintenance of the learner 'paths' was given by S Cembalo, a summary of which is reported separately (Section 4).

Learner search criteria and the information navigator (TINlib)

We have already discussed the main aims and objectives of the TINlib catalogue project (see article by Cleary and Makin in Section 3). However, I should like to add four further points. First, the Centre's catalogue is currently being upgraded from a single-user system to a local area network among staff offices. This makes it possible to start collecting more end-user comments, particularly important before any customisation of the system is undertaken. Second, there are constraints on compatibility imposed by the university-wide library system when contributing bibliographic records to the Union Catalogue. Third, with the current level of requests and new media introduced, the in-house system can only cope with the current accessions. This means that on-line searching of the entire collection in one of the mainstream languages is not yet possible, and conversion of the old records is now the main hurdle to be surmounted. Fourth, the records that are appended as sample records have been prepared and indexed by the librarian. Indexing is subject to modification and amendments once on-line access to the database by the advisers and teaching staff has been evaluated. While the experts' and the compiler's knowledge of the subject and familiarity with the terminology is an asset in terms of selection and rejection, this does not supersede the importance of the views of learners and learner groups (Aitchison & Gilchrist, 1987).

Indexing of material for self-access and resource-based learning requires a closer look. All learning and teaching material is checked for technical quality (either scanned or listened/viewed in real time) and examined for contents. It has been found necessary to spend time on these quality checks; otherwise too many problems - either technical or learner-based - turn into time-consuming chores and give a bad impression of the service. The task is a demanding one, especially with less commonly taught or 'rare' languages, but every effort is taken to ensure that material is not shelved, if there is any doubt about its contents and quality. The main contents analysis and indexing normally includes the following categories of information:

- linguistic (language/dialect; type of material; level of difficulty; target level)
- subject/topic
- pedagogical (learner specific & task-management)
- bibliographical
- in-house management (location, shelving, technical details, copyright, etc)

It is necessary to give sufficient information on the general orientation of the course, the linguistic difficulty, indicating any special features (e.g. if the course is in the target language throughout, or if specialist dictionaries are required). In the three records (see Appendix, p101) the notes field is used for a synopsis (using natural language) so as to clarify any ambiguities that may have arisen when searching by using other fields (e.g. thesaurus).

Searching in TINlib can be either by using fields or filters. Stem search allows moving quickly through a list, e.g. alphabetically for authors, titles, etc, and list filter can pick up any word in the titles. On the so-called free text side, word filter searches all fields for a particular word and string filter goes through all fields in the record including characters in the middle of a word. Word filter and string filter searches scan the entire database excluding the 'data-only' fields (e.g. price, pagination), but searching can take longer. Query by Form (QBF) allows the searcher to define the fields and combine them within the search (e.g. language, topic, level); Query by Example lets you highlight a record and this serves as an example; Query by Repeat will recall the last Query by Form search and you can refine the search. There is also a facility for range searching (alphabetical and numeric). Search terms may be combined within any filter searches and in any of the QBF fields with Boolean logic operators (AND, OR, NOT). TINlib has a saving facility enabling you to save the results of a search and combine the results of several searches. It is the QBF searching, using thesaurus fields, that allows combinations like *language + topic/subject (e.g. literature)* or *language + level (e.g. intermediate = level 3) + pronunciation*. A separate Report Generator Module is available for creating lists, reports and charts.

Thesaurus - is it necessary?

Why did the Centre opt for a system that relies heavily on a thesaurus? Especially when we need to bear in mind that the library aspects are carried out mainly by one person; being aware of the fact that creating and maintaining a controlled vocabulary is a time-consuming task, especially when there is no ready-made thesaurus at hand.

It was decided that the only way ahead is to start from the end-users. We need to find out about the learners' world: watch them and listen to them, and if the exact words do not bring results, they may be used to signpost to the nearest equivalent, synonym or near-synonym. Take, for example, the ambiguity we discovered when we were searching for some 'rare' language terms: a whole list of language names emerged for Chewa, i.e. Chichewa, Nyanja, Chinyanja. It was crucial for the Centre to establish an authority on these terms, in a hierarchical structure. A thesaurus can provide the necessary semantic features in a structured way, e.g. synonym, antonyms, quasi-synonyms and homonyms. It can also show hierarchical relationships: broader terms vs narrower terms; preferred terms vs non-preferred terms, as well as related terms. In a vocabulary-controlled environment the searching task is made easier for the learner (it's the indexer's job - and one can always argue over what is good indexing and what should be indexed). Had the Centre's collection comprised vast amounts of topical or current affairs type of data, then free text searching facilities would have been considered a priority. The TINlib allows for free text searching, but as a secondary option.

It became clear that with a specialist subject like language learning it is disputable that 'a good search can be carried out without considerable care in choosing word stems and synonyms and the use of contextual logic' (Dubois, 1987). In TINlib a thesaurus display is in a 'window' area on the screen, so that terms can be pasted from the thesaurus without having to retype (thus avoiding any misspellings). Thesaurus construction with TINlib is relatively easy, using the Edit. An advantage with it is that you can navigate between the Broader Terms and the Narrower Terms, thus making the searching more interesting and motivating.

The building up of a thesaurus for a language learner started with the creation of the core areas, i.e. the language terms, the language learning terms and the material typology. The British Education Thesaurus and the ERIC Thesaurus are the main sources for comparison. Topics and other subjects (e.g. hierarchical links between terms like aggression, violence, crime, revolution and crime) can be less defined at least in the very beginning, but these can be built up - time allowing. The prerequisite is careful indexing, and systematic post-co-ordinated indexing. This represents a major investment in time and money. Thesaurus maintenance also is an important factor to bear in mind. For the Centre it was a choice between building up a database for free text, which might in time produce 'uncontrollable' hits, or starting with something which can gradually be developed into a more meaningful information retrieval device.

Concluding remarks

The TINlib cataloguing and information retrieval system has features which are attractive to the learners: the thesaurus facility provides for a cognitive mapping of the subject, yet allowing intuitive searching and navigating. The area where more research and development needs to be done is creating links for multimedia components. I think a controlled vocabulary in a form of a thesaurus is the first step towards creating an environment where searching the core subject needs to rely on more detailed hierarchical structures (e.g. language, linguistic information) and in which building up of topics can be started, improved and sharpened. For individual learners it allows for serendipity in searching (navigation). A 'learner' thesaurus can also form a sound foundation for introducing other support systems, like advising.

Appendix

Title: Greek language and people
Author : Hardy, David
Editor : Doyle, Terry
Publisher : BBC
Pub place : London
Pub date : 1983
ISBN : 0563165758-book
Pagination: 287 p. : ill.; 22 cm. Glossary.
Binding : pbk
Lang : eng
Lang : gre
Medium : sound cassettes
Medium : video cassettes
Publication type : course textbook
Accession number : 220
Location : Private Study
Accession number : 221
Location : On request - Private Study
Classification no. : GR C
Shelf reference : GR CG 1-4
Shelf reference : GR CG 1-5(V)

Notes: A basic introduction to the Greek language, way of life and customs of the Greek people. It is aimed at developing the ability to speak, to understand spoken Greek and to extract information from within texts. There are accompanying sound recordings and 10 off-air television programmes. The Greek alphabets are introduced in the first four units. The book is divided into two parts: Part I (Units 1-10) represents a survival kit and covers the language and topics of the recordings and the ten television programmes. The TV programmes have been filmed mainly in Greece, in Epirus, Macedonia, the Pelion, the Peloponnese, the Mani, Athens and the islands of Corfu. Part II (Units 11-20) focuses on the language of expressing opinions, feelings, talking about likes & dislikes and generally develops your understanding of spoken Greek. Most chapters have a section on "Understanding Greek" dialogues. There are four single-sided sound cassettes include: GR CG 1= Chapters 1-5 (35 min.); GR CG 2= Chapters 6-10 (32 min.); GR CG 3= Chapters 11-15 (32 min.); GR CG 4= Chapters 16-20 (35 min.). There are five video cassettes containing the 10 off-air recordings; each TV programme is 25 min. See also "The Greeks have a word for it" two documentary films.

Subject group : Greek language
Thesaurus term : conversational
Thesaurus term : courses
Thesaurus term : GREEK LANGUAGE
Thesaurus term : level 1
Thesaurus term : level 2
Thesaurus term : MODERN GREEK
Title keyword : Greek
Title keyword : Language
Title keyword : People
Catalogued : 07/12/92
Updated : 09/12/92
Source : Accession 1984.

Title: German for musicians
Author : [Hawkins, Jocelyn]
Corporate Body : Nottingham University
Edition : 3rd rev. ed.
Publisher : Nottingham University
Pub place : Nottingham
Pub date : 1981
Pagination : viii, 161 p. : ill.; 30 cm.
Binding : spiral binding
Lang : eng
Lang : ger
Medium : sound cassettes
Publication type : textbook with exercises
Accession number : 212
Location : Private Study
Classification no. : GE C
Shelf reference : GE CC 0-14

Notes: A 60-hour special purpose course for university students reading Music. The course was designed for class use but is suitable for self-instructional use. It concentrates on correct pronunciation, grammar structures and reading comprehension (excluding complex historical texts). "The Lesson Book" contains a Preliminary Lesson and Lessons 1-13; each lesson is divided into Grammar and Vocabulary sections; from Lesson 5 onwards Reading passages are added. "Language Laboratory Texts" and Reference Materials" booklets are needed when the learner is working with the sound cassettes. Other printed material include: "Notes for instructors with Tape Texts", "Notes for instructors with note for private users", "Exercises" (folder) and "Model answers". There are 15 single-sided sound cassettes: GE CC 0= Preliminary Lesson; GE CC 1-13 - each cassette contains one lesson; GE CC 14 - Consolidation. It is recommmended that students work with a dictionary.

Subject group : German language
Thesaurus term : academic German
Thesaurus term : courses
Thesaurus term : GERMAN LANGUAGE
Thesaurus term : music
Thesaurus term : reading courses
Title keyword : German
Title keyword : Musicians
Catalogued : 03/12/92
Updated : 22/02/94
Source : Accession in 1982.

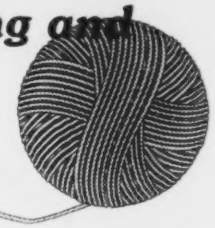
Title: French pronunciation [student's book]
Author : Martineau, R.
Author : McGivney, J.
Publisher : Oxford University Press
Pub place : London
Pub date : 1973
ISBN : 0198720386- student's book
ISBN : 0198720394- teacher's book
ISBN : 0198720408- workbook
Pagination : 29 p.; 25 cm (workbook)
Pagination : 40 p.; 25 cm (teacher's book)
Pagination : iii, 59 p.; 25 cm. (student book)
Binding : pbk
Price : 01.00 (teacher's book)
Price : 02.95 (student book)
Lang : eng
Medium : sound cassettes
Publication type : course textbook
Accession number : 228
Location : Private Study
Accession number : 229
Location : On request - Private Study
Classification no. : FR C
Shelf reference : FR CB 0-25

Notes: Pronunciation course in French designed mainly for the use in universities, polytechnics and colleges of further education. It is suitable for any intermediate or advanced language course. There are exercises, tests and drills which practice realistic conversational language. The accompanying "Teacher's manual" contains further drills and the guide to the tests; there is also a separate "French pronunciation workbook". Part I of the Student book contains "Introduction" and linguistic terminology. Part II contains Units 1-24. Units 1-4= Basic vowel contrasts; Units 5-6= Nasal vowels; Units 7-8= Semi-vowels; Units 9-10= The consonant /R/; Units 10-13= Articulation - Further problems; Unit 14= Syllables and sense groups; Unit 15= Unemphatic and emphatic stress; Units 16-18= Intonation; Units 19-20= Basic cases of obligatory and prohibited liaison; Units 21-22= Optional liaisons and other problems of liaison; Units 23-24= 'E' caduc. For student cassettes FR CB 0-25 - see the correlation between text and cassettes in front of the book. The cassettes vary between 15 and 35 min.

Subject group : French language
Thesaurus term : courses
Thesaurus term : FRENCH LANGUAGE
Thesaurus term : French phonetics
Thesaurus term : level 3
Thesaurus term : level 4
Thesaurus term : level 5
Thesaurus term : pronunciation
Title keyword : Book
Title keyword : French
Title keyword : Pronunciation
Title keyword : Student's
Catalogued : 13/12/92
Updated : 13/12/92
Source : Accession pre 1991.

12. *Files and catalogues: meeting and answering learner queries in a resource centre*

SAM M CEMBALO



Cataloguing, information retrieval and self-access

As the learner enters a self-access resource centre for his/her own use, the problem of cataloguing ranks second in the chronological order. After the first steps into the centre when finding out what is where and the general orientation of things, she/he has to choose a document for however long she/he has chosen to work in the resource centre. The learner's point of view chosen here is at the basis of the whole cataloguing and information retrieval system problem. In very broad terms, the heart of the matter is to enable the learner to reach the documents she/he wishes to use. From the teacher's or resource centre manager's point of view, the problem is a fairly straightforward one; documents have to be identified in nature, location and contents terms. Nature and location are book-keeping (document-keeping) problems that have found many solutions over the years and centuries, they are widely documented in the book-keeping literature available to any competent librarian through professional societies. Computer programs are available that will require traditional format and identification data to be input according to international standards.

Retrieval is another matter, although a sizable amount of work has now been devoted to solving the problem. The problem is a double-sided one, the number and choice of descriptive criteria on the entry side, the mystery and complexity of keywords and selection criteria for the learner on the output side.

Description of documents for learner choice implies a two-way process for the person in charge of making up descriptions; identifying with the learner population to imagine how individual learners can possibly formulate a query on the one hand and checking that the criteria selected in this way are accessible to the learner on the other. A number of possible criteria are given below (after Riley, 1992). All of these can be of use but the choice will depend on the availability of the criterion for analysis and meaning in terms of language learning practice.

Some parameters for the description of self-access material for language learning

Language: Basque, Danish, English, French
Medium: cassette, audio tape, video tape, videodisc, slides, transparencies, book, newspaper, magazine, article, backup documents, worksheets, transcriptions, CD-ROM, floppy disks
Bibliographical details and acquisitioning: title, series, author, year, place, publisher, ISBN/ISSN, number of pages/duration, dimensions, price, account, source, date of acquisition, card number
Situational features: language variety, accents, speed, non-verbal signals, participants, roles, social identity, mono/dia/polylogue, spontaneity, formality, setting 'noise'
Language functions: apologising, asking for information, bargaining, demanding,

excusing, expressing anger, expressing joy, forgiving, greeting, giving information, introducing, inviting, narrating, permitting, refusing, promising, suggesting, warning, witnessing
Topics: art, atomic energy, banking, crystallography, drainage systems, fast food, geography, history, horse racing, hotel management, journalism, knitting, physiotherapy, quasars, religion, sociology
Genre (for authentic documents): conversation, commentary, debate, drama, interview, lecture, lesson, literature, narrative, news, phatic, presentation, political speech, prayer, service, encounter, telephone call, weather bulletin
Genre (for didactic documents):
Fields: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, functions, language for specific purposes
Levels: beginners, intermediate, advanced
Skill: speaking, listening, reading, writing, interpreting, note-taking, translating
Activity: conversation, cloze test, dialogue, dictation, drill, listening for information, observation, presentation, role-playing, simulation, test, questionnaire

Multicriteria search and retrieval

Analysing the documents and encoding these parameters is one thing. Using them to retrieve a document is another matter. Card files can only accommodate a limited number of criteria. Computer files are more flexible and allow multicriteria search. When a students wants a video-taped document concerning mining with real-life miner's speech of less than five minutes of duration (an extreme case, admittedly), an intelligent query program will select a list of documents fitting the description (in this case, a list of one or maybe less). Finding the same from a card catalogue would be close to impossible if the document available lists more than five items under the mining heading.

A number of programs offer multicriteria search capabilities under various forms. The criteria for selecting such a program would of course include ease of manipulation for the learner but also the possibility to store technical and bibliographical data under internationally recognised standards. Exchange of information between language centres cannot be even dreamt of if this condition is not met, let alone exchange of documents. Appendices 1 and 2 (p107) show two templates for multicriteria search from the GESBIB III program which can be easily customised to accommodate different standards.

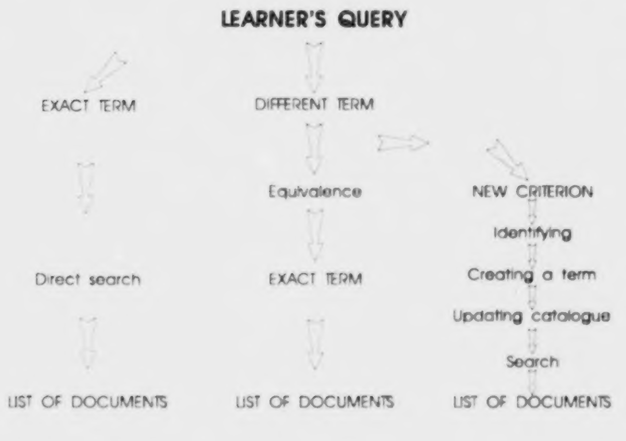


Figure 1

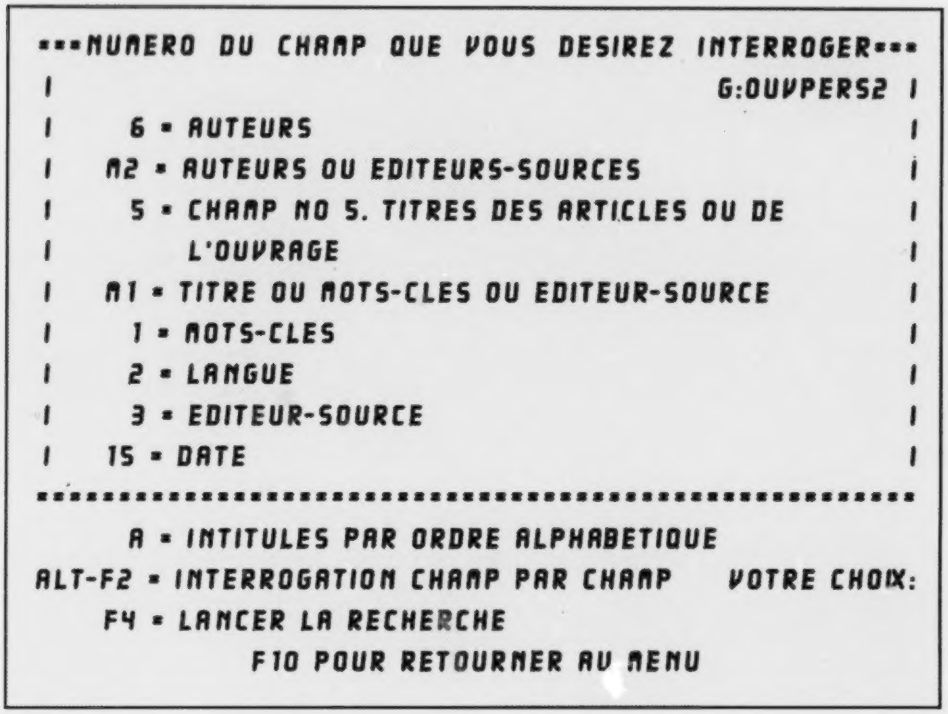
Files and query have to change with time and the changing demands from learners. Analysing the documents is prerequisite for setting up the storage and retrieval system. Keeping the criterion up to learner's wording and demands requires an updating system summarised in figure 1.

The left-hand column shows the process when a learner asks for documents using terms known to the system; a query will be answered by a list of documents the learner can choose from for immediate or future use.

The middle column describes the case when a learner used a term outside the keyword list for his query. The term used is, however, a synonym of one of the keywords. It is necessary, by means of checking with the learner through a thesaurus, to redirect the query into the appropriate system keyword. A thesaurus is a necessary adjunct to the searching system, which should be able to meet the problem of synonymy.

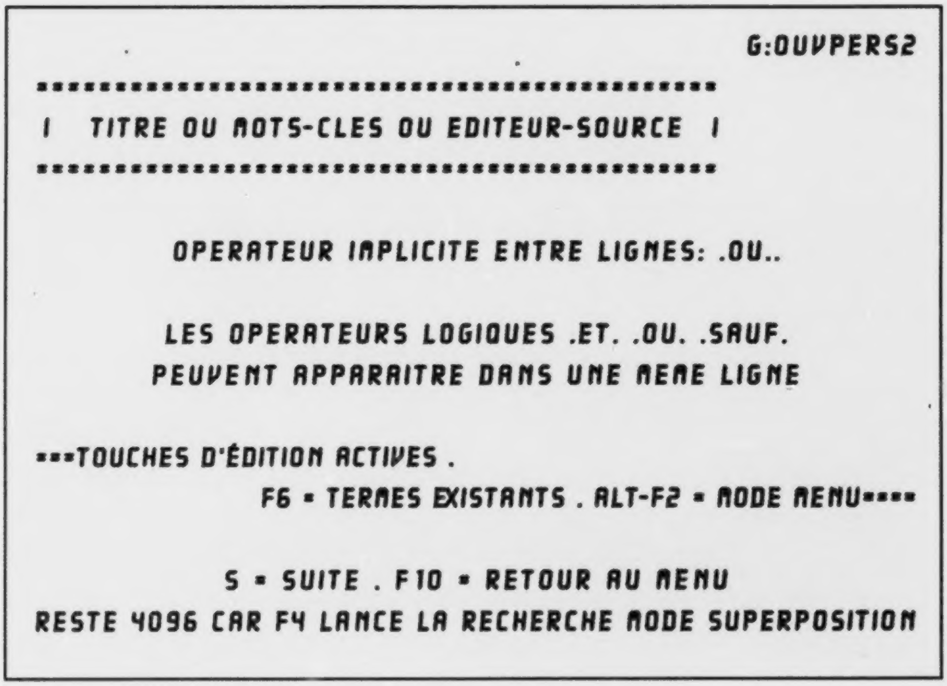
The right-hand column represents a far more difficult problem to the retrieval system and the resource centre. It describes the case when a learner uses a criterion not yet used in the analysis. Obviously, the learner's query will not meet any immediate success and outside help is needed. The first necessary step is to detect the system's failure to produce an answer to the student's query and store the wording of the query. The next step consists in revamping the catalogue and creating a new criterion with a new heading. The last and most time and energy-consuming step will be a fresh analysis of the documents to incorporate the new criterion into the descriptions. At the end of this fairly heavy process the learner's query will find an answer via his own criteria. Part of these operations are carried out by the system (detecting and storing the query) but a large workload demands staff intervention and time. Provision should be made to allow for maintenance of the criterion list if the retrieving system is to serve its purpose: meeting the learner's needs in his or her own terms.

Appendix 1 - GESBIB III template for type of criteria selection



```
***NUMERO DU CHAMP QUE VOUS DESIREZ INTERROGER***
I                                     G:OUVPERS2 I
I     6 = AUTEURS                                I
I    M2 = AUTEURS OU EDITEURS-SOURCES            I
I     5 = CHAMP NO 5. TITRES DES ARTICLES OU DE  I
I         L'OUVRAGE                              I
I    M1 = TITRE OU MOTS-CLES OU EDITEUR-SOURCE   I
I     1 = MOTS-CLES                              I
I     2 = LANGUE                                 I
I     3 = EDITEUR-SOURCE                         I
I    15 = DATE                                   I
**************************************************
      A = INTITULES PAR ORDRE ALPHABETIQUE
ALT-F2 = INTERROGATION CHAMP PAR CHAMP   VOTRE CHOIX:
    F4 = LANCER LA RECHERCHE
            F10 POUR RETOURNER AU MENU
```

Appendix 2 - GESBIB III template for selection through title and/or keywords or source



```
                                              G:OUVPERS2
*****************************************
I  TITRE OU MOTS-CLES OU EDITEUR-SOURCE  I
*****************************************

       OPERATEUR IMPLICITE ENTRE LIGNES: .OU..

       LES OPERATEURS LOGIQUES .ET. .OU. .SAUF.
      PEUVENT APPARAITRE DANS UNE MEME LIGNE

***TOUCHES D'ÉDITION ACTIVES .
          F6 = TERMES EXISTANTS . ALT-F2 = MODE MENU****

           S = SUITE . F10 = RETOUR AU MENU
RESTE 4096 CAR F4 LANCE LA RECHERCHE MODE SUPERPOSITION
```

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

13. *Implementing a support system for language learning in a resource centre on an industrial site*

Danièle Abé

In this paper we report on the implementation of a support system for the learning of the English language, which was carried out in a resource centre on one of the industrial sites of a major French car manufacturer in France.

After briefly stating what the company's and the learners' needs and goals were two years ago when we started designing and implementing this system, we shall try to explain what pedagogical and communicative targets we had in mind, and what learner support system we implemented to meet these requirements.

In the last part we shall discuss the feedback data we collected throughout this project, and a summary evaluation will be made of what the learners achieved in the system.

The general background

THE COMPANY'S NEEDS

In the early '90s, the company was in the process of merging with another European non-English-speaking company. English was to be used as a common language at all levels of the hierarchy. Not only did the top managers have to be competent in English in the short term, but also the lower-middle management and even a few technicians who were to be in permanent contact with their foreign colleagues.

The growing demand for the use of English as a working and political tool forced the company to have a different approach to the teaching of English. In order to respond to the needs of individuals, with various professional and communicative needs, levels of achievement, and fields of interest, they installed resource centres with the hope of reducing the cost of private lessons.

However, in order to make a transition between classes and individual work, they wanted the users to achieve an actual 50-hour training period in the resource centre, with learning programmes to be defined and carried out individually with the occasional help of a tutor.

THE PRODUCT ENGINEERING SITE

In October 1991, the GRETA de La Défense, one of the state-run adult training centres, was chosen as a subcontractor to design and implement a learning support system for the opening resource centre (RC). Among the 5000 people working on the site only 150 were in close contact with their foreign counterparts. They were all executives, aged 25 to 60, mostly engineers, and they had learnt English for about ten years.

As their learning at school had dealt mostly with written language and grammar, they could read their technical magazines, but they had difficulties with oral skills. Moreover, their inability to handle meetings or telephone calls had been reinforced because they had not had much opportunity to use spoken English since their school days. They were also self-conscious, because their foreign colleagues were thought to be able to use English far better than they could.

To promote the idea of learning in a resource centre, the Personnel and Training Department made the centre as attractive as possible to the learners. Special care was taken with the location and interior design of the premises and financial incentives were set up for the various departments. The RC was installed in a vast room situated in a building in the middle of the site, with ten workstations, 370 learning documents (CAL software, videodiscs, video and audio tapes and television programs), with one small counsellor's room and one larger room off the main area.

Engineering the learner support scheme

THE OBJECTIVES

Apart from meeting the company's requirements in terms of pedagogical and financial issues and making the most of the facilities that had previously been chosen by the firm, the goal was to set up a totally new approach to people who were used to learning in traditional classes, and had preconceived ideas about how a foreign language should be learnt - if not taught. The objective was to make them adopt different behaviour and shift attitudes towards learning and to encourage them to work on their own with as little help from the tutors as possible. This was based on the various experiments we had carried out on the autonomous working scheme at the CRAPEL (University of Nancy II).

Focusing on self-directed learning
Unlike some centres which tend to reproduce the traditional conditions of the teaching situation, where the 'tutor' prescribes work and/or uses English all the time - such examples are frequent in existing French resource centres - here learners would make their own decisions, and the counsellor would help them to find criteria for analysing their choice of strategies, so that they could increase the relevance and efficiency of later decisions.

The counsellor would not actually be present in the RC during opening hours, but he/she would carry out counselling sessions in his/her office off the main area, to enable learners to be free to choose their own documents and encourage them to work entirely on their own.

Counselling about methodology
The information provided during the counselling sessions would differ drastically from that of traditional face-to-face lessons. It would concern mainly, if not only, learning methodology, i.e. counsellors would help the learner define his/her objectives, select the appropriate documents and techniques to work on, forge his/her own evaluating procedures - all actual learning being done without the presence of the counsellor.

As counselling was mostly to concern working methods, it was to take place in the mother tongue and not in English.

Focusing on authentic communication in the target language
Communicative practice in English was to be achieved in situations as authentic as possible with a native speaker (individually or in groups), and totally separate from the counselling sessions.

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Engineering an 'open' resource centre

The goal was to make the learners feel that acquiring English could be and ought to be carried out anywhere: apart from being encouraged to bring their own documents to work on if they had any, people were also encouraged to integrate the learning of English into their everyday activities and to seize every professional opportunity to use English in their professional lives. Facilities were provided to allow them to work either in the RC itself or outside, at home or in their cars.

THE ACTUAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

After having been selected and tested by the company, learners attend a 'starting point' session, in groups of eight to ten people, where they are informed about what they are supposed to do during their 50 hours of individual work. They are also shown the various materials they may be working with, especially the new teaching facilities such as videodiscs or CAL stations. At the end of the session they are asked to make their first appointment individually with one of the counsellors.

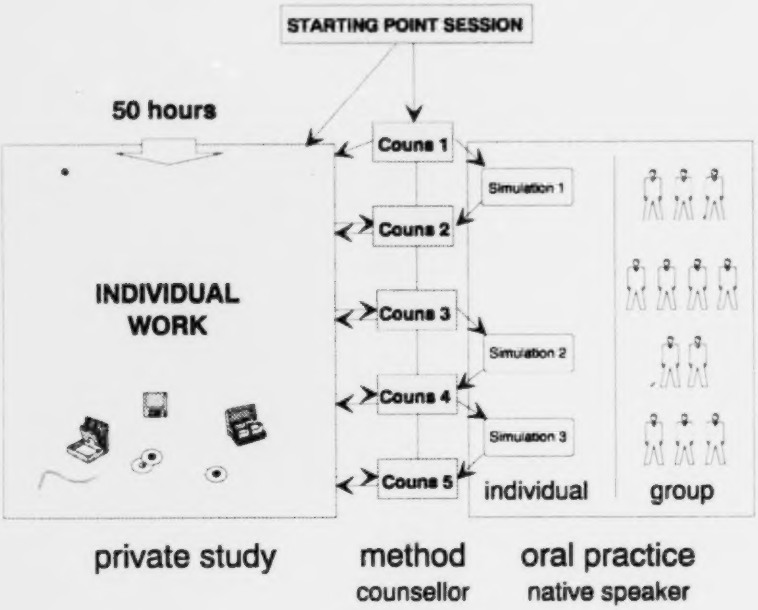

Figure 1 - The learning framework

Counselling sessions - originally 40 minutes - are limited to five during the whole learning period. The first one is essentially to establish their general learning programme, and the content of their first twelve hours of private study. The following ones are to discuss the previous choices made and to prepare another twelve hours of individual work. The last one is devoted both to analysing previous work and to the learner's self-assessment.

After each session, an appointment is made for the next one, the date being chosen according to the learner's availability and his/her capacity to work for about 12 hours between two sessions.

Simulations usually concern professional situations. Their number is limited to three, without exceeding 30 minutes. They are generally recorded, and the recording is used as a useful basis for further work.

Open oral sessions - one hour - are held at a set time every week for each level of achievement in English. Participants talk freely, without being corrected, and are asked to choose their own subjects. As the groups vary constantly, people have to book in advance for each session.

When learners have achieved their 'contract' of 50 hours, they can go on using the various facilities, but their counselling sessions are limited to one every 20 hour work period.

THE COUNSELLING FRAMEWORK

It was established that counsellors should devote 75% of their time to counselling, 25% of which was for 'behind the scenes' tasks. Pedagogical tasks were to be achieved during the remaining 25%, with the counsellors' working day being limited to eight hours. This was a basis for calculating the global cost, and also to regulate the appointments in the diaries, with a maximum of six forty-minutes appointments per day.

Implementing the learner support scheme

APPOINTING SUITABLE STAFF

To make it clear that the counselling sessions were about methodology, not practice of English, **counsellors** were preferably French speaking - which the learners accepted after a while. The three counsellors working at the RC received training at the CRAPEL for a week, followed by a few subsequent training sessions on the premises. Though the counsellors' main task was to conduct counselling sessions, they were also asked to label, classify, and store the existing documents and to describe them in a pedagogical catalogue. They also recorded some television programmes, thus increasing the number of the documents available in the centre to about 500.

On the other hand, **native speakers** of English were selected for communicative and not pedagogical skills, according to their ability to simulate any professional situation required by the learners, or to conduct open conversations in groups.

In order to co-ordinate the implementation of this scheme, a part-time **pilot** was appointed whose tasks were to co-ordinate the work of counsellors and natives, to maintain coherence throughout the whole set-up, to act as a link between the company's Personnel Department and the educational institution, and to report at regular intervals.

ELABORATING WORKING TOOLS

Information for learners about the strategy we were using and about the practical details that were necessary to achieve successful learning in the RC was not only provided through the starting point session, but also in an **introductory document** given to future users before their first visit to the RC.

The pedagogical catalogue mentioned earlier informed users about the various documents available, giving such details as content, keywords, learning aids, length and accents heard.

Information about learners was collected during counselling sessions, but we also gradually felt the need to establish a **file for each learner** which now contains:

- one starting and several follow-up grids to be filled in by the counsellor during or after each counselling session;
- a follow-up grid with boxes to be filled in by each learner whenever he/she works, in order to enable him to keep a record of what has been done, and to have this information ready for discussion with the counsellor;
- a simulation grid, so that the native knows exactly what role he/she is supposed to play, in what situation, and how s/he is to behave during the conversation;
- a self-evaluation grid to be filled in at the end of the fifth counselling session, to sum up methods used, progress made and general evaluation of the system.

DEALING WITH NUMBERS

As all learners had to be followed by a counsellor, entries had to be planned according to the counsellors' availability. This meant that their flow had to be calculated approximately and the 50 starting point sessions programmed a few months in advance so that the system could absorb enough people, without getting blocked.

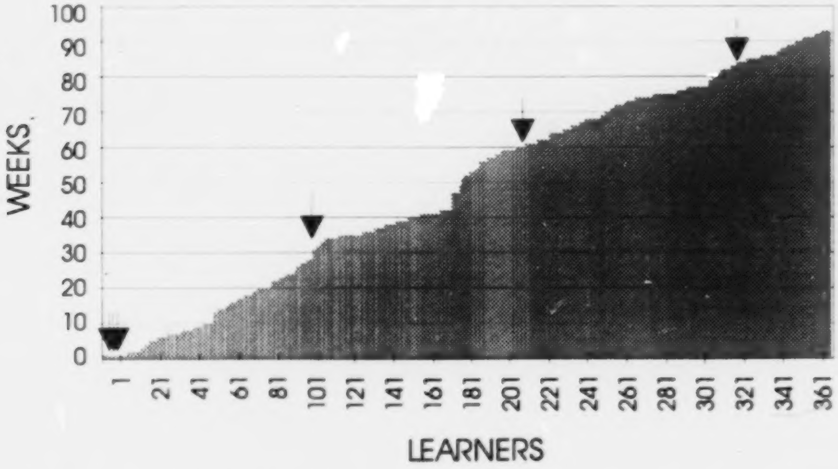

Figure 2 - Evolution of the number of counselling days with regard to the flow of learners

When the RC opened in October 1991 - week 1 in the chart - the calculations had shown that **three days of 'counselling'** per week would ensure a total of 100 learners having had five counselling sessions in June 92, i.e. the end of the school year. At the end of June 93, there were 366 learners actually registered in the system, and three more 'counselling' days had been added, as shown by the arrows in the chart.

After one year the pedagogical catalogue was achieved, very few new documents were to be stored and analysed: the 25% time devoted to pedagogical tasks was considerably reduced. On the other hand, learners reached the amount of work required between two sessions (twelve hours or more), so they had more to discuss and the counselling sessions had to be increased by 25% (50 minutes instead of 40).

Though the counsellors' and native speakers' diaries were as full as possible, a constant 24% of the appointments were missed or cancelled, mainly due to unexpected professional meetings. To ensure a better output of the system, we decided to overbook with one or two extra appointments per day.

In October 91, as most learners were already attending English classes, the oral expression sessions were postponed, and actually implemented in June 92.

IMPLEMENTING THE LEARNING SUPPORT ON THE SITE

We have already mentioned the frequent meetings that were held with the Training Department. We also held meetings with representatives of the various departments to explain the set-up.

Evaluation of the learner support system

WHAT TOOLS FOR WHAT MEASURES?

Although we had permanent feedback from the counselling sessions, we felt the need to gather more reliable data. That is why we used all the quantitative data collected from the grids mentioned earlier and from other records, which were computerised at the end of each month and analysed periodically to assess the system and to keep the Training Department informed. For the first year we did not have sufficient data to allow us to stand back and collect relevant information. After nineteen months, we now have a clearer view about the way users work and learn, and more information about their individual working time, the cancelling of counselling sessions or simulations, the use of the various facilities in the RC, and so on. Some of the figures below concern the first 159 learners who left the Centre.

Since our goal was to help and encourage learners to learn differently, we tried to measure the success of this learner support system as early as possible through an assessment of the general feeling about the RC, which was of importance on such a self-contained site. This was done through the self-evaluation grid mentioned earlier which the learners filled in at the end of the fifth counselling session. Of course those who had abandoned did not fill in this grid, but counsellors were able to collect some feedback data at the counselling sessions attended. Some of the figures below concern the first 71 learners having filled in an evaluation grid.

With this grid, we also measured the progress that had been made in English. We did not choose to evaluate learners through a common test at the end of their 'contract'. This was firstly because the counsellor's role was not to control, but to help, and secondly because such tests would have been difficult to design, each learner making his own progress in his specific area, with his own achievement objectives - which could vary greatly according to the level of achievement in English of their counterparts in the partner company. We relied on the self-assessment of the learners concerning the progress they had made in their professional situations.

THE USERS' OPINION OF THE SYSTEM

Out of the learners who had attended their five counselling sessions, 98% were satisfied, or even very satisfied (one-third). Those who had not entirely completed their whole 'contract' were as satisfied as the ones who had, though they expressed regret at not having had sufficient time to work. Even the ones who abandoned told their counsellors that the idea of the RC was most interesting, but that they were not available enough to work at that specific time. A few, though, stated that having no teacher to meet, they were unable to force themselves to leave work or cancel a meeting and come to the RC.

The counselling sessions were said to be most useful for 90%, and the number of counselling sessions sufficient for 70%. We have to remember that those figures come from the early stages of the system. Now learners usually work an average of 11.4 hours between two counselling sessions and find this number to be sufficient.

THE EFFICIENCY OF THE LEARNING SUPPORT SCHEME

Meeting the firm's requirements

The original goal was 50 hours of work. If this includes both private study and support, i.e. counselling sessions, simulations, open expression sessions, and starting point sessions, we can say that the average measured learner (people having had at least two counselling sessions) has reached the target (52 hours of work for the average learner having been measured). As quite a number of people dropped out in the first weeks of implementation, the amount of work done decreases to 41.5 hours for the total number of registered users.

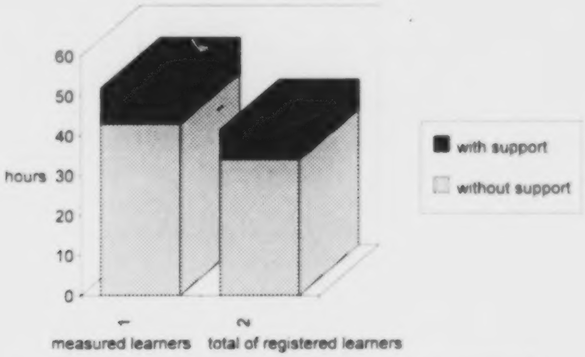

Figure 3 - Average amount of work done (159 'out-going' learners)

Of the very first users, 30% abandoned the system after the first counselling session, and only 15% completed their 50 hours of private study. But now the figures have changed and a sample taken in September 1992 shows that 45% have achieved their 50 hours of study, and only 10% abandoned after the first counselling session. Those figures are improving every day, since half the 'out-going' learners choose to carry on with their learning, once they have finished their 'contract'.

Meeting the learners' requirements

One has to remember that their oral skills were poor and that they wanted to be more efficient during meetings and telephone calls.

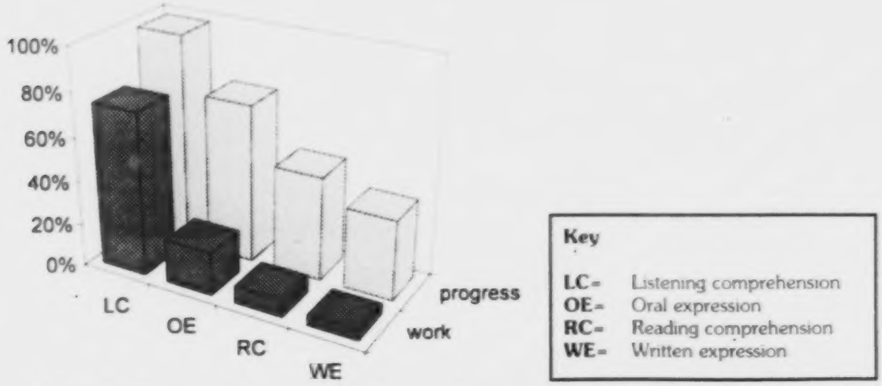

Figure 4 - Average amount of work done and progress achieved in the various skills (first 48 learners)

They worked on listening comprehension (LC) for about 75% of their time. As oral expression (OE) sessions were only set up in June 92, it does not seem to represent a very large part of the work done (but this correlates with the other measurements we had before). Self-evaluation of the progress made shows that 95% of learners admit to having made progress in listening comprehension, but they also think that this improvement has increased their progress in the other skills, in particular oral expression. The question asked was: 'how much progress has been achieved? A lot/quite a lot/a little?' The cumulated results are shown above.

Reaching our goals

Improving the learners' methodology
Out of the first 49 learners, 70% stated that they had improved their learning techniques in LC, and 34% in OE. For the next 22, those figures increased to 95% for LC and 64% for OE.

Towards an 'open' centre
For the past six months, the total number of learners actually calling at the RC per day was steady: between 11% and 13.5% of the total number registered, actually in the system. The visits with 'human' support (either counsellor or native speaker) never exceeded one-third of the total of daily visits. According to other data, we know that 55% of the private study is done outside the RC, which shows that learners use the RC as an open centre.

Conclusion

As can be seen on the pie-chart, the use of 'human' facilities represents only 17% of learners' total working time. Native speakers are used for 6.12% of the working time, and counsellors for just under 11%. The amount of time spent on face-to-face work (counselling or simulations) equals that spent on group work (8.53% as compared to 8.43%). Only 1% is devoted to face-to-face simulations with a native speaker. Those figures and other data we collected will now enable us to make further decisions about the relevance of certain aspects of the set-up.

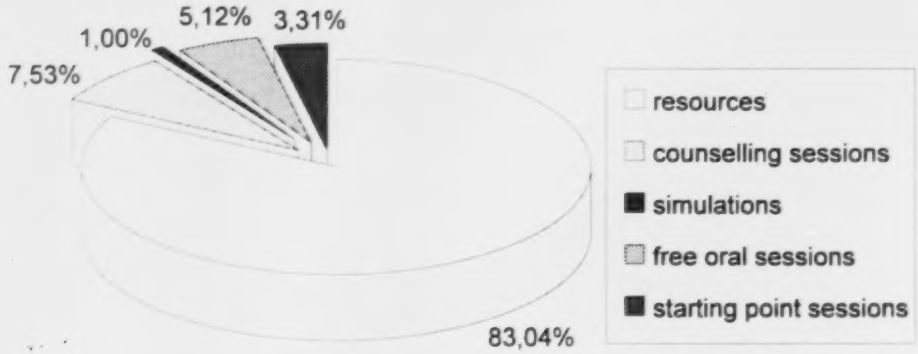

Figure 5 - Use of the various facilities according to average total working time (159 out-going learners)

Though the engineering of learning support in the resource centre required a lot of anticipation of the solutions to the various problems that might arise, its implementation was made possible thanks to a great deal of communication between the various actors of the system, i.e. the learners, the counsellors, and the Training Department staff.

The scheme seems to be well accepted and efficient on the site, being a complement or an alternative for those who cannot attend classes because of their work and meetings.

Learners have been able to change from traditional classes to private study - though it took a few months to obtain satisfactory results, especially concerning the amount of work done between two counselling sessions. They progress, show initiative in the way they work and usually express the satisfaction of 'feeling better' in their specific professional situations.

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Chapter 13 - A support system on an industrial site - Danièle Abé

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5

Institutional issues: staff and management training

This section concerns management issues which need to be addressed in any self-access centre, independently of its size. As Jack Lonergan points out, it is convenient to consider roles and functions separately, but in reality, the same people often fulfil several of them if not all.

Issues concerning the institutional recognition of self-access centres as legitimate and valuable language learning environments by management are covered. Jack Lonergan argues convincingly that a proper administrative framework and sound financial long-term planning must underpin the development of self-access centres. If not, large capital investments can be wasted along with staff energy and expectations, with the predictable loss of morale.

Within such a context, the training of staff and learners becomes a realistic aim. Jack Lonergan lists a number of topics essential to promote the management of change in self-access centres for language learning.

In her case study Stella Hurd provides an insight into the complexities of planning and setting up a self-access language learning centre.

Suggested readers' Guide

This section on institutional issues related to self-access language learning is concerned with the administrative framework and staff and management training.

Access point

Together with chapter 7 in Section 3, chapter 14 in this section is one of the recommended access points for policy makers under pressure of time.

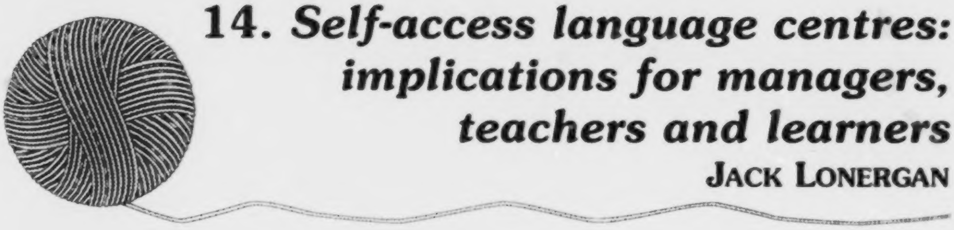
Suggested follow-up

- *Teachers/advisers*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  This section contains useful case studies, as do chapters 8 and 9 in Section 3 and Section 6 as a whole.

- *Policy makers*
  with time to learn, read around and think about the issues
  For discussion of the relevant issues you may want to read chapter 14 and then Section 3 (ch 7). Then, for practical examples, you could go on to Section 3 (ch 8 and 9) and Section 6 (ch 16).

  under pressure of time and needing to take action
  For further discussion of relevant issues go to Section 3, chapter 7 and Section 2 (ch 4 and 5).

  in industry
  Chapter 14 will be of particular interest.



14. *Self-access language centres: implications for managers, teachers and learners*

JACK LONERGAN

Self-access as a part of learning

In many ways, self-access has always been a part of learning, even if the mode of learning has been given another name. From primary school work to university study, learners have been encouraged to research or discover things for themselves. The topics might include leaf shapes, UK export figures, cultural aspects of business in Japan, or humour in the works of Jane Austen. The materials available for study may range from playground flora and fauna to sets of academic journals in library stacks.

In disciplines which have traditionally used printed materials as main sources, such as law, history, literature, or economics, this tradition is particularly strong. Newspapers and magazines, specialist journals, reference works of many types, and, of course, source texts are available to all, their information awaiting retrieval at a variety of intellectual levels. For convenience we can refer to this type of work as a library mode of self-access.

In the sciences this tradition is mixed. The print archive exists alongside the necessary scientific apparatus. This special equipment may be simple: ordinary household materials and domestic utensils; or more complex, requiring well-resourced and supervised laboratories. Modern self-access language centres, with their wide range of technology, are perhaps more akin to science laboratories than the former language laboratory. We shall see that they certainly need resourcing and supervision - as, indeed, do good libraries based on print materials.

In languages, the library mode of self-access is widespread, yet there are evident difficulties in transferring this experience to self-access language centres. One reason for this may be that the gadgetry of satellite TV, interactive computer programs, or CD-ROM seems too far removed from current experience to allow the transfer to take place. The new media in self-access language centres may not appear to lend themselves to activities which have the same import as current library mode self-access does.

To encourage a proper transfer of experience, it seems that training is needed. The training programmes will affect, to a greater or lesser degree, all levels of the system: from institutional managers to teachers to learners.

Institutional managers

The foremost responsibility of the management is to sanction the very existence of the self-access language centre (SALC). Management must appreciate the value of a SALC on a **pedagogic level**; and must allow its development at an **administrative level**.

The **value of the work done in a SALC** by learners must be acknowledged through the schemes of work which the institution allows, and which incorporate SALC activity. This means that courses should be thought of in terms of more than just class contact hours. Traditionally, courses have presupposed some homework or project work, where this is linked directly to the class-based instruction. Knowing that these activities can take place, course designers can nevertheless talk confidently of a language course taking, say, 120 hours of teaching time. With self-access, the course measurement involves the extra dimension of hours of committed study by the learners. These hours of study are qualitatively different from traditional guided study. They form part of the actual learning process, for which the learner takes greater responsibility than in existing systems (see below). This qualitative difference affects the quantification of courses. In the description of learning modules in our school of languages, course content is quantified by several parameters: class contact hours, student committed time, and the number of credits for the module.

Accreditation is a necessary concomitant to the acknowledgement of the pedagogic value of self-access work, if the learners are working within the framework of some type of examination or accreditation. Work which is apparently required of learners, but not recognised by some form of accreditation, soon takes second place to required work which does attract accreditation. The management must be aware of this, and allow self-access work to be suitably awarded.

It follows from the above that time is an essential ingredient in a self-access learning programme. Management must ensure that the SALC is open to learners when they have time to attend, or conversely allow timetabling of classes to take into account the SALC opening times. Similarly, management must allow the teaching staff the time to carry out their SALC-associated tasks (see below). It is the academic staff, supported by technicians and clerical staff, who provide the pedagogic infrastructure in a SALC which makes the learning experience worthwhile. The deployment of human resources by management is as important as the allocation of funds and physical space.

The **administrative responsibilities** of management cover the whole of the SALC operation. Together with an acknowledgement of the pedagogic value of self-access as a learning mode, there must be a willingness to support the SALC in a variety of ways. At the heart of this support lies finance.

A SALC may be purpose-built, may be adapted from little-used space, or may replace an existing facility. Whatever is used, there will be the initial capital outlay to cover some or all of items such as tables, chairs, rewiring and cabling, hardware, software, and clerical equipment - whether a database or a filing cabinet. Most newly established SALCs attempt to provide a welcoming atmosphere for the learners; creating a warm learning environment may mean additional outlay on fixtures and fittings such as carpets, wall decorations, or better lighting. Even to consider opening a SALC therefore requires management to consider seriously the size of the initial capital grant.

Capital grants, however, may be generous enough to give a new venture a good start, but they are rarely renewed. Recurrent funds for maintenance are also essential. Apart from support for the teaching staff, management's responsibilities lie mainly with technical and clerical support.

Technical support is essential where there is a range of equipment in use. There are places which teach languages with their hardware dotted around different locations, using little more than might be found in a family home - such as two radios, two televisions, two audio cassette players, a word processor, a video recorder, a little-used record player, and a CD player with too few discs. In such circumstances, faulty equipment causes annoyance, but might not disturb the main thrust of the family - or language learning - activity. In a SALC, however, there are different considerations. Not only do faults need repairing, but the hardware may need preparation. To return to the analogy of the sciences, no physicist or chemist would run a laboratory without an assistant or two. Working in collaboration with the teachers, the technicians can provide a variety of services. Recording specific programmes from satellite TV, using a night and weekend timer, is one common task. Booting up computers with different programs for different learner groups can be useful, and technical help is always welcome at induction sessions for new users of a SALC. These points are referred to again below, when considering the choice of materials which teachers make for a SALC.

Documentation plays an important part in a SALC. The paperwork will cover both academic and administrative matters. To the first belongs a range of tasks, covering the catalogue of materials, or the guidance notes provided to encourage learner autonomy. To the second belong the maintenance of records of use, the continual updating of the accession records when new materials arrive, and other tasks such as maintaining membership lists, where appropriate.

A further consideration concerns **security**. Without limiting access to a degree which the learners find off-putting, there needs to be a system of control over the hardware and the software - and possibly even the fixtures and fittings. Ideally, a SALC should always have at least one person available for help and advice, but this role cannot always be equated with a policing one. Electronic tagging, used for books in many libraries, offers one solution. With proper copyright clearances, many original pieces of software may be duplicated for use in the SALC, so that their theft or destruction is not too serious. However, many institutions have to rely on the vigilance of staff, and management must appreciate the need for sufficient funds to replace missing items.

The current rapid developments in establishing new SALCs mean that well-established and successfully managed SALCs are of great interest to teachers and managers from elsewhere. It may be necessary to have a policy for dealing with visitors, so that staff at any level feel that they have time available for outside visitors, rather than feeling compromised and under pressure when they arrive.

The distinction made above between pedagogic and administrative matters is of course not always as clear as this in reality. The nature of the SALC within a teaching institution means that policies will often encompass both aspects. This is even more the case where teachers are concerned, and the following section should be read bearing in mind the constant overlap between pedagogic and administrative points.

Teachers

The role of the teacher in a self-access learning programme is crucial. All the issues mentioned above as concerns of management devolve in some way to the teaching staff. In addition, they have the primary responsibility for mapping out the learning path which the SALC users will take. The first step in this process involves course planning.

A language learning programme with a meaningful self-access component is different qualitatively from a more traditional course. As suggested above, the work undertaken by the learners is more than an extension of the classroom lessons; it is valid work in its own right, possibly qualifying for accreditation. This means that SALC activities must form part of the course and have a legitimate status within the course. There are teachers whose first response to this is rather negative, seeing the tasks chosen for the SALC in a different light. Some may feel that the activities based on satellite TV or computers are invented merely to accommodate the wishes of those who have supplied the hardware. Others may feel that the main objectives of management in providing a SALC in the first place go no further than cost cutting: reduce classroom contact time, and save on teachers' salaries. However, these reactions overlook the changing population of language learners in many institutions.

For many potential SALC users, access to video and television, to computer-assisted learning programs, or to interactive CD-ROM is a normal part of their learning experience in other disciplines. Not only do they welcome the use of the technology, they in fact come to expect it, and question its absence in the modern curriculum. A second feature of language learners today is that they no longer present themselves in discrete groups each with homogeneous needs. There are now many diverse sets of learners, of many different ages with many different learning objectives. Using a SALC meets some of the logistic problems of catering for this diversity.

The choice of materials to be used in a SALC is clearly very important, yet can cause some problems. These problems can probably be measured by three parameters: the needs of different groups of learners; the range of hardware available; and the range of software available. A fourth consideration overrides all these: for what purpose are the materials in the SALC at all?

A SALC serving a small user group may find the needs of the group easy to meet. Where there are large numbers of users, whose abilities cover all ranges and whose motives for learning are varied, then priorities must be set in the early days of the SALC. It is probably better to have something very worthwhile for a few than to offer an insignificant amount of material to everybody.

The hardware most commonly encountered in SALCs consists of the following: satellite TV receivers and video recorders; audio cassettes and playback facilities; and computer-assisted language learning packages (CALL). The CALL facilities may range from PC-compatible packages which run from a single disk to a complete CD-ROM arrangement, incorporating digitised audio recording, worksheets of various kinds in hypertext, and a store of video images. The volume and quality of materials available, at least for more commonly taught languages, probably decreases as one reads each item on the above list. Satellite TV gives almost unlimited access to a vast bank of authentic materials, designed to cater for all ages and tastes, but not of course all levels of language ability. Audio materials have long been the standby of language teachers, and there are increasing numbers of good video programmes on the market. As far as CALL is concerned, the situation is more complicated. At all levels of technological complexity there are CALL programs on sale which ought never to be used. Complexity in the hardware is not an essential feature of good CALL. Some of the early PC-compatible programs have stood the test of time, especially those which offer an authoring package to the teacher, so that CALL materials are tailor-made for the interest of the target group. At the time of writing, the language learning packages available in CD-ROM are in terms of quality a long way below that of other commercial materials available in that medium, such as games or encyclopedia.

However, the main criteria for choosing materials relate to the purposes to which they will be put. The diversity of media and learners' needs referred to above means that decisions must be well-informed and take into account the particular circumstances of the institution, the SALC, its staff and its users. An exhaustive taxonomy of materials cannot be given here, but they may be broadly categorised as follows:

- language practice materials;
- materials where language is presented as a model;
- material for input into discussions or projects;
- material for the learners' enjoyment and entertainment.

Language practice materials, as meant here, rarely come from authentic sources unless special tasks are developed to accompany the materials. Practice in pronunciation, morphology, lexical acquisition, sentence building, structured comprehension and similar discrete tasks, is often better carried out using CALL or audio programs and, if the accompanying materials are suitable, video.

Language as a model for the learners to imitate can come from all sources. Depending on the methodological treatment of the source material, this imitation will be relatively passive, as learners watch, listen and absorb; or highly structured, as in tasks which require repetition or re-statement.

Materials which provide input into discussions and projects can also come from a variety of sources, more especially from authentic ones. In selecting these materials, the encyclopedic use of CD-ROM as authentic material for this purpose should not be forgotten, even though there are too few language programs for practice and imitation available. Many learners greatly enjoy the information retrieval tasks associated with using CD-ROM, and will work at the computer for longer than they would search in reference books.

Not to be forgotten is the sheer pleasure of language learners in successfully understanding and appreciating materials designed to entertain native speakers. On satellite TV, for example, this could include a very wide range: sports commentaries, quiz shows, soap operas, classical drama, and films.

In maintaining these resources, the teaching staff will draw on the resources provided by management: the technical staff for making recordings, setting up programmes, and the like, and the clerical staff for the maintenance of records. As far as the learners are concerned, the teaching staff must be sure that there is adequate guidance within the SALC, and that there is a suitable induction programme for new users - a group which will frequently also include other staff. Furthermore, the teaching staff need to set up systems of record-keeping to monitor the use of the materials by the learners, and the use made of the SALC by individual learners.

Learners

The learners are the intended beneficiaries of the effort in setting up and running a SALC. However, as users of the SALC they may need convincing of the value of the SALC on a pedagogic level - perhaps sharing the same scepticism as the management (see above). For this reason, it is imperative that the programmes of work given to the learners are seen to be valid. This validity will of course stem mainly from the content of the tasks. But it will also come from other aspects of self-access.

The learners are required to take more responsibility for their own learning when using a SALC. This responsibility may be latent with certain target groups, but for others, there may be a need for a three-stage programme involving self-awareness, self-assessment, and self-discipline.

To work in a self-access mode successfully, learners need a heightened sense of self-awareness. They need to appreciate their own objectives, ability and learning strategies. In a standard classroom situation, this reflection may not be necessary or indeed possible. Peer group needs, the format of the coursebook, the style of the teaching - all these may determine the pattern of learning, the rate of progress, and the objectives of the course, with no room for individual considerations.

Having been made aware of these issues, learners then need to monitor their learning through a process of self-assessment which may also be new to them. This requires an objective appraisal of their own readiness to proceed, of the desirability of repeating some elements of the work, or of the need to seek expert advice on the way forward in self-access. To work in this way clearly requires a degree of self-discipline from learners, which again may be new to them.

The discipline comes not only from self-awareness and assessment, but from the mundane matters of timetabling and record keeping. Work in a SALC should follow a balanced programme. Learners should keep accurate records of their work and their progress, bearing in mind both the short-term and the long-term objectives of the course. It may be possible to study in a SALC twice a day or only once a week. Whatever study mode is adopted needs to be consistent with the learning goals of the language course and realistic in terms of other demands on the learners' time. By creating a programme that the learners perceive as realistic - that is to say, achievable and worthwhile - teachers invest the self-access learning programme with the required validity for acceptability by the learners.

Summary

The delineation of the tasks above between managers, teachers, technicians and clerical staff may not be so clear-cut in an actual language teaching establishment. In a private school, the management (the owners) might also be the director of studies and the school secretary, with computer expertise coming from the owners' children. In a much larger establishment, senior management may be so distant from the concerns of the SALC managers that there are several layers of bureaucracy between initial financial planning, the receipt of budgets, and the actual disposal of cash and the deployment of resources. Nevertheless, to a greater or lesser degree the points outlined above need to be taken into account and a training programme prepared. Teachers need to be aware of all the issues involved, because in most cases it falls to teachers to prepare the arguments to convince management that learners will benefit from studying in a self-access mode.

Self-Access Language Centres: key areas for concern

CHECKLIST

Institutional Managers

pedagogic

- ☐ acknowledgement of value
- ☐ incorporation into schemes of work
- ☐ accreditation
- ☐ timetabling for learners
- ☐ availability of time for teachers

administrative

- ☐ financial planning
- ☐ buildings, fixtures and fittings
- ☐ technical support
- ☐ clerical support
- ☐ security
- ☐ guest visitors to centre

Teachers

pedagogic

- ☐ course planning
- ☐ timetabling
- ☐ materials choice
  - ☐ practice materials
  - ☐ language as model
  - ☐ material for discussion, projects
  - ☐ entertainment

administrative

- ☐ maintenance
- ☐ induction
- ☐ guidance
- ☐ record keeping

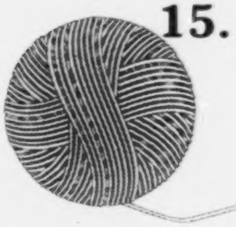
Learners

pedagogic

- ☐ self-awareness
- ☐ self-assessment
- ☐ self-discipline

administrative

- ☐ timetabling
- ☐ record keeping



15. *The Language Learning Centre at the University of Central Lancashire: a case study*

STELLA HURD

The University of Central Lancashire opened its Language Learning Centre in September 1993. It caters for approximately 600 students on mainstream degree programmes and over 2,000 on the institution-wide Applied Electives Language Programme. Members of the public enrolled with the LX Centre can also use its facilities and pay to do so as part of their course. There are in the region of 30 who at present fall into this category.

Self-access

For a centre to be truly self-access its materials must be not just on view to the user but able to be touched and examined. Browsing is an essential feature of self-access learning. By this definition the University of Central Lancashire's Language Learning Centre is not genuinely self-access. You can flip through newspapers and magazines and try your hand at some CALL activities. What you cannot do is examine audio and video cassettes, for these are held out of sight and are accessible only on production of a library card which is retained until the cassettes are returned.

Does this matter? We tend to think not. After all, there is a constantly updated catalogue containing lists of all materials and a sophisticated database that will advise on availability if you know what you want or even help you in your search. Moreover the range of worksheets available which are on open-access suggest a very motivating starting point for any choice of activity. All of them contain answer keys and the vast majority are for listening work and include the identification number of the audio or video cassette on which the activities are based.

Nevertheless, independent rather than self-access learning is, strictly speaking, a more accurate description of what goes on in this particular centre. And, for the most part, the activity is directed by the tutor rather than the student, though this is not to say that students cannot choose to work on any additional activities whenever they wish, nor that occasions do not often arise when the teacher suggests rather than directs. Student feedback is of the utmost importance and has had a considerable impact on how the Centre has been used in its first year of operation. It has also been instrumental in the planning of future developments.

Planning to set up the Centre

The Language Learning Centre, as it was designated, was officially opened on 14 September 1993. It takes up the whole floor of a building and contains several rooms housing a range of equipment and materials. Its special features include a multi-channel cabled satellite system that can connect with any ordinary domestic receiver. At present there are six fixed channels receiving programmes in French, German, Spanish and Italian. One channel remains flexible in the sense that it can be tuned to receive any satellite recording within the area in any language according to staff request and can also act as a backup system in the event of failure of the fixed system. There is also an on-line database to record borrower details, give information on materials and monitor student use.

The accommodation comprises:

- a large open-plan multi-activity room containing twelve video and eighteen audio presenters, two Apple Mac computers loaded with Speakwrite, five BBC computers with a range of different software, an extensive shelving system containing worksheets in twelve languages, more shelves containing reference material, newspapers and magazines, a photocopier and an area for private study;
- a satellite TV room with 24 presenters and access to a range of foreign TV channels;
- a computer room containing seventeen networked computers carrying a collection of CALL material;
- a Vektor room housing seven workstations with materials on laser disk in six languages and on CD-ROM in three. This room also contains material from the TELL consortium, circulated free to all HE institutions during 1994;
- the technical and resources room containing, at the time of writing, in the region of 3,000 video cassettes, 700-800 audio cassettes and approximately 200-300 other resources including books, slides and OHP and CALL materials. This room also houses three technicians/resource assistants and the database;
- an office for another technician and technical equipment for satellite operation;
- a room for photocopying, storage and recording, accessible to staff only.

It is a centre with a high standard of accommodation and equipment backed up by excellent technical support and good operational systems. But there are, as with most ambitious projects of this kind, plans that were never realised for a variety of reasons and problem areas for which there are unlikely to be any solutions, at least in the short term.

The original budget was drawn up to cover the costs of modification of an entire four-storey building, one floor of which was to provide space for a Language Learning Centre. A considerable number of choices had to be made and plans were amended and modified many times before ideas could begin to take shape. The inevitable constraints on finance, possibilities for use of space and choice of fixtures and fittings led to a situation in which the tail (budget) was continually wagging the dog (Centre). The original open-plan layout had to be abandoned as the shape and infrastructure of the building meant that the cost of knocking down walls would be prohibitive. Plans for double glazing and ventilation had to be modified and air-conditioning abandoned. Security was allowed to slip down the agenda so that other items could be prioritised and the limited budget used in the most immediately effective way. Moreover there were university policies on the colour, shape and style of furnishings and fittings to which the planners were expected to adhere. In the end, there was not enough money to do everything exactly as planned and certain items had to wait.

Nevertheless, by September 1993 all building and decorating work was completed, technical staff were in post and the equipment was fully installed and operational. There was also a range of worksheets available in five langauges to be used with video and audio extracts on cassette. These were the product of the Materials Development Team which had been in operation for a year prior to the opening of the Centre.

In all physical senses the Centre was up and ready to go. It offered a warm, attractive environment in which to study and access to a variety of multimedia learning materials.

Setting up systems

There is a sense in which you can only refine systems to a certain point before becoming operational, and the early months of use of a centre are a time for continual piloting, monitoring, modification and adjustment so that the systems can be gradually fine-tuned to suit a particular set of circumstances.

The Centre catered in the first year of operation for over 3,000 students on degree and institution-wide language programmes (known in our system as Applied Language Electives and bearing credits at levels 1-3 within the CATS system). It was essential that students should have access to information and advice on making the most of the equipment and materials in their language learning and that all procedures should be as comprehensive and comprehensible as possible. The task needed to be tackled simultaneously on all fronts: technical, administrative and pedagogical.

One crucial factor in the success of all the ensuing activity surrounding the setting up of systems was support from management. Coupled with this was the need for recognition by staff that while that support was there, resources had limits. The three main areas for action were staffing, materials development and training - both in the use of equipment and the pedagogical implications of a programme delivery that was to include an independent language learning element.

The appointment of co-ordinators for language learning development and for IT and equipment, both members of the academic staff on a reduced teaching timetable, ensured that key areas were properly managed. Each also chaired a team of staff in the areas of materials development and IT respectively.

Two more non-academic staff were appointed to make up a team of four based in the Centre, three of whom were full-time technicians and the fourth working on a casual part-time basis, mainly in the area of materials development and general administration. All four worked on a rota basis to ensure that the reception area was staffed at all times. It was crucial, therefore, that they had a good knowledge of the resources available, how to access and store them and advise on their loan and use. Each was also assigned specific duties such as maintenance of equipment, computer programming, copying tapes, laminating worksheets, recording off-air broadcasts, building up the database, organising magazines, newspapers and information from publishers, maintaing records, etc. Other systems for storage, classification and cataloguing, financial record-keeping, loans, orders and stock-keeping were developed by the co-ordinators in consultation with the head of department, taking into account the views of technical and other interested staff.

It was very quickly decided that no materials should be allowed to be removed from the Centre, and that the loans system should involve the student library card which would be retained until all materials had been returned. This system proved to be both acceptable and successful, resulting in high levels of co-operation and minimal loss.

Materials development

One of the key challenges for an institution setting up independent language learning facilities is that of providing an adequate range of attractive self-study materials, whether electronic, audio, video or in print, and that without these basic resources no such centre can function effectively. To provide these materials requires time, effort and expertise on the part of the staff, which in turn demands a firm commitment at departmental, faculty and directorate level to providing appropriate support, such as reducing staff teaching hours and releasing money for essential resources. Support of this kind was forthcoming.

From 1992 to 1993, prior to the opening of the Language Learning Centre, twelve academic staff representing English, French, Spanish, German and Italian were brought together as a team to create self-study materials at different levels, initially in the major languages taught by the department. All were allocated hours from their teaching timetable.

As the year progressed and the number and range of activities grew, it became clear that a clearer focus was needed and that activities should be developed which were designed to be integrated into existing and future programmes in a relevant, logical and pedagogically sound manner, i.e. they should become an integral part of course provision rather than a general extension of skills hitherto largely acquired in the classroom. The proposed move from three to two hours class contact on the Applied Electives Language Programme intensified the need for a re-focusing of this kind.

This change of direction in the Materials Development Team led to the production of a wider range of worksheets to include material specifically chosen for its topical, functional, skill-based or grammatical content insofar as it related to existing or projected course programmes. Published photocopiable material was also examined and adapted or modified as appropriate to correspond to the needs of students.

It was decided that for the start of the academic year 1993/94, coinciding with the opening of the Centre, students on the Electives Programme should be required to spend one hour of their three hours of self-study time working on directed tasks selected and often devised by their lecturer. Languages staff would work to the same brief, but with a margin of leeway for individual interpretation and application.

The key consideration was that the independent language learning element should be an integral part and not a bolt-on element of the course. Above all, students should be given the chance to work with a variety of media, made aware of the role and importance of independent learning and given clear guidance on how to gain maximum benefit from their time spent in the Centre.

Devising activities

This is an area of work with wide appeal, mainly because of its creative potential, but also because of the challenge it presents through its paradoxically restrictive nature. The two major aims of the Materials Development Team during its first year of operation were:

- to find relevant, enjoyable and intellectually stimulating extracts with which to work;
- to create activities at the appropriate level and varied in type and purpose, e.g. for vocabulary extension, to practise a point of grammar, for intensive or extensive listening, or as a stimulus for discussion.

It was also necessary to consider the following general points when creating activities:

- Which media?
- How many and what kinds of activities?
- How long should they take to do?
- Open-ended to be followed up in class or self-contained free-standing?
- With or without an answer key?
- Instructions in English or the target language?
- For individual or pair/group work?
- What type of format and presentation?
- As a model for new learning or for consolidation purposes only?

More specific ideas for activities included:

Before viewing:

- making a list of ideas associated with the topic or theme;
- listing some of the vocabulary you might expect to hear;
- using a dictionary: searching for/checking given vocabulary;
- general knowledge questions based on the topic about to be explored;
- matching-up exercises: vocabulary/phrases.

While viewing:

- re-ordering statements;
- ticking words heard (in a list of distracters);
- multiple choice questions;
- comprehension questions;
- true/false statements;
- gap-filling;
- transcription;
- translation/re-translation;
- synonyms/antonyms/homonyms;
- who said what? selecting from two given lists;
- to what/whom do the numbers heard refer?;
- finding questions for given answers;
- re-constructing a conversation from cues;
- completing grids;
- practising a specific grammar point.

Throughout its second year of operation the Materials Development Team has continued to build a supply of wide-ranging activities for all levels. There are no reductions in teaching hours and production is consequently more of a steady trickle than a rushing flow. **All** academic staff are now expected to produce language learning materials for independent use and, despite the inevitable time constraints, this has led to a greater collective interest and knowledge within the languages deparment. Students too are starting to request more materials on specific topic areas and activities of particular types, e.g. interpreting, aural comprehension, grammar practice. And when it is **students** who ask, even initially reluctant staff are likely to respond.

By the end of its first year of operation, in addition to the five major European languages, there were materials in Greek, Portuguese, Polish, Japanese, Chinese, Russian and Urdu.

Implications for teachers

Planning the course to incorporate an independent language learning element as an integral part is by no means straightfoward and requires a great deal of time, energy, reflection and imagination. It also demands a co-ordinated approach. While teachers are likely to get a great deal more out of teaching a course into which they have had a significant input, it is usually very difficult, if not impossible, to find time during the busy teaching months to bring all those involved together. What tends to happen is that one or two people will work on the independent language learning element and inform the others in the team. There is nothing wrong with sharing out tasks, and over time it can lead to very fruitful outcomes. It is a question of balance and avoiding the overloading of a few enthusiastic individuals.

But it is not just a question of time. Teachers need training and guidance, not only in materials development, but also in areas such as learner support, use and management of resources, responding appropriately to a variety of language needs, assessing progress, using and authoring computer-based activities, and many more.

At this university the concerns have been addressed partly through staff seminars and training days, partly through an on-going dripfeed of information from those making and shaping policy. Certain aspects of independent learning have enthused individual staff members who have made it their business to find out as much as they can and share their knowledge with others. Consultation has been widespread and systems and procedures adjusted where appropriate and possible in accordance with feedback suggestions. It is important that teachers are given the chance to be involved at every stage. A collective feeling of ownership can be highly motivating.

One area of particular difficulty with training is responding to the needs of part-time staff. It is well known that getting a group of part-time staff together is virtually impossible. We have coped with this problem in a number of ways: group training sessions, printed information packs on systems and procedures and, particularly with regard to materials development, individual sessions which, although time-consuming, have been well worth the effort in terms of results. Part-time members of staff wholly responsible for a language have also been paid extra hours to develop materials.

Many teachers have commented that this radical change in the delivery of courses has had a significant effect on the approach and methods they have adopted for the two hours of class contact time. Receptive tasks, particularly those involving listening have increasingly been undertaken during the self-study hours, with students being asked to carry out a range of listening tasks from worksheets based on specific video or audio extracts. Satellite TV has taken on a much greater role as it is particularly suited to an independent mode of learning. Students have been asked to watch programmes such as the news on a particular day and summarise the main points or complete grids to demonstrate comprehension of specific details of events.

Class-based activities are becoming more geared towards the development of oral language skills with role-play and simulation, discussion and debates taking a much higher profile. It is also now more possible to fine-tune activities to tie in with needs and desires, whether this be a point of grammar that has arisen from a task set for independent learning and caused general difficulty or self-study materials that have been enthusiastically received and lend themselves particularly well to oral follow-up in class. It has been important to build continuity between classwork and independent work and this has been a very challenging and rewarding aspect of the changing approach to course delivery.

There will always be sceptics who remain unconvinced of the benefits and see any attempt at 'imposing' independent learning as a management tool for cutting the number of teachers. It has to be weighed up whether trying to change attitudes is a more effective use of time than letting events take their course, in the hope that demonstration of the benefits to teachers as well as learners will in the long term prove to be the most effective tool. It is also increasingly becoming clear that our students expect these facilities to be available and that multimedia is already very much present in many aspects of their lives, both for learning and leisure purposes. The benefits for teachers include:

- access to an ever-increasing bank of materials and activities of all types linked to a variety of media;
- the potential for a more creative and stimulating approach to teaching and learning through having to reflect on current teaching practice, and the subsequent sharing of ideas;
- a more equal and satisfying relationship with students based on the recognition of a diversity of needs, abilities and aspirations to which an appropriate, sometimes individualised response is required.

The whole concept of self-access, independence and the assumption of individual responsibility for learning mitigates against any notion of a **formal** training for teachers, apart from practical matters such as use of equipment and knowledge of procedures. It is more a question of raising awareness of the issues, ensuring there are opportunities for discussion of the vast range of possibilities, testing and sharing ideas and demonstrating effective outcomes. Above all, teachers need to be shown that the advantages apply as much to them as to their learners.

Implications for learners

Learners too need convincing that learning for part of the time on your own is as valid as learning in a group with a teacher. However sophisticated and state-of-the-art equipment might be, however modern the furniture, however aesthetically pleasing the colour scheme, no resource centre can contribute to learning by its sheer physical presence. Without proper guidance and support systems, clear information and adequate preparation, a learner working on his or her own is likely to have a frustrating and demotivating experience, to get bored quickly and probably leave in confusion, if not anger.

Most students do not like learning independently at first and some of them remain extremely difficult to win over. They may be impressed and excited by the equipment, but lose enthusiasm as soon as it becomes clear that although we hope learning will be enjoyable through this method, it is never going to be easy and requires a very special kind of personal commitment. Many potential problems, if anticipated, can be prevented or at least minimised. These include lack of organisational skills, a view of learning as essentially passive, the need for approval, unwillingness (probably through fear) to take on any personal responsibility for learning, and little or no experience of self-assessment or setting realistic goals.

Current research tells us that the most effective language learning takes place when students assume some responsibility for their own learning. One of a teacher's many duties then must be to train learners in acquiring effective learning techniques. Published or in-house produced guidance sheets on the many aspects of independent language learning are proving very useful at the Centre. Students have access to information on general matters such as organising time and assessing learning styles and attitudes, as well as guidance on approaching specific tasks such as translation, summary and oral presentation, and dealing with specific grammatical points.

One initiative that will contribute directly to this effort is a project funded by Enterprise in Higher Education. Entitled 'Open learning for languages - an induction programme' it was designed to be written by learners for learners and ran from October 1993 to July 1994. Its aims were:

- to set up an open learning induction programme for all students enrolled on language courses;
- to involve students in the design and production of independent language learning materials;
- to enable students to develop skills and competences appropriate to the workplace;
- to disseminate good practice in the development of independent learning materials and the adoption of appropriate strategies.

The induction programme contained five sections;

1 Open learning and its value as a language learning method.
2 What makes a good language learner?
3 Strategies for effective language learning.
4 Language study skills.

5 A practical guide to learning through video and audio with examples in French, Spanish and Italian.

Students who worked on the project gained level 2 student-initiated credits and gave extremely positive feedback in their end-of-year assessed presentation. At the time of writing the programme is available in hard copy and in Braille. It is currently being put on the computer network ready for the new academic year and will form part of the induction programme for new students.

In the absence of any formal learner training modules, it is essential that initiatives of this sort are promoted and supported. This kind of project can also have implications for other departments within the university. Computer Services have shown some interest in developing it into a multimedia project for which it would be particularly apt. Attracting support from within the university gives a higher profile to an activity, which in turn can lend weight to arguments for greater funding and better resources. And this, of course, has implications for the quality of support that can be given to students.

Monitoring and evaluation

Self-monitoring is an integral part of any mode of independent learning and requires an ability to identify one's own language gaps, together with a willingness to explore ways of dealing with them. This in turn calls for self-discipline and persistence. Students at the younger end of the age range have tended to find this aspect of independent learning particularly difficult. Even mature students who may well have more expertise in managing their own time and a great deal of determination to succeed lack confidence in their own ability to diagnose areas of difficulty and assess the degree to which they can remedy these on their own before seeking advice from teachers.

Ensuring that there are answer keys to exercises is one way of giving practical help and offers a very useful preliminary diagnostic tool. Learners can see immediately what they have got wrong, even if they cannot always know why it is wrong. Consulting reference material or discussing common areas of difficulty with fellow students, followed by the selection of appropriate remedial exercises for practice has been the preferred course of action. Sometimes a teacher's help has been sought and individualised goals have been jointly decided. It is this flexibility and close matching of activity to need that has emerged as particularly valuable in this first year of operation.

A learning record was piloted in the second semester with a view to encouraging students to take a more active role in their own learning. This was brief and structured, requiring students to note down the materials they had worked with and the amount of time spent, and to assess their proficiency through encircling a number 1-5. They were also encouraged to comment briefly on their own performance and make suggestions for follow-up in the section marked 'action'. More elaborate learner diaries have been in force in the EFL section and have formed part of assessment. There are plans to refine and extend the use of all such records.

In addition to self-monitoring by students, monitoring usage of the Centre and its impact on the learning process has taken a high priority. A post-induction survey was a useful starting point in assessing student readiness to learn through independent means. Other monitoring exercises have involved staff noting numbers of students engaged in video, audio, satellite or computer-based tasks at a given time on a given day over a set period of weeks. The results have confirmed the existence of peak and low times of use and the need for measures to ensure maximum use of all facilities.

An end-of-year questionnaire was circulated to Electives students in French, Spanish and German which gave a clear indication of the amount of time students spent in the Centre, the kinds of tasks undertaken, the benefits gained and the difficulties experienced. Results showed a high level of satisfaction with the Centre and its role in language learning.

The database has proved to be an extremely valuable aid to monitoring. Resources are entered according to language, level, title, topic, grammar points, skill, task and worksheet (if appropriate). All materials can be accessed via any of these categories. Moreover, every time a resource is borrowed it is logged on the database. It is thus possible via the response analyser facility to obtain detailed information on the use of resources globally over a period of time, or on one particular resource on a given day or part of a day.

It has been important to recognise from the outset that the usefulness of output from the database is entirely dependent on the degree of detail given to the input, which in turn has highlighted the need for tight control in this area. Completed forms must accompany all materials to be entered, giving full details on language, level, topic, etc. No materials are accepted unless accompanied by the standard form.

Looking to the future

After one year of operation the picture is a great deal clearer, both in terms of assessing what has been achieved and looking ahead to what needs to be done and how best to move forward.

The Centre now has a CCTV system and all equipment where possible is secured. Security, while far from perfect, is adequate enough to allow for greater access and flexibility in the way the Centre is used. The seven IBM Vektor workstations which hitherto have been accessible only to users from the LX Centre and small groups of students supervised at all times by their teachers will now be used more extensively and incorporated where possible into classroom teaching. Students should then be able to work on programs independently as a follow-up. CD-ROM is to be developed through the Apple Mac computers and the Vektor equipment. A CD-ROM server for the network is also planned.

Materials development has largely centred around the Applied Electives Programme. Much of the work is eminently suitable for mainstream degree provision and there will be a greater focus in this area.

Assessment is another issue that needs to be addressed in a more structured way and discussions are already underway on how changes might be made to reflect more closely the independent learning element.

There are certain categories of students for whom the flexibility of independent learning has great appeal and others for whom there are special difficulties, e.g. those with disabilities, those with child care and other family responsibilities, those who live at a distance. We are only beginning to address concerns which must inform future developments, particularly in a university which gives extremely high priority to widening access.

Finally, it is hoped that there will be more collaboration among institutions in order to economise on time through preventing duplication, and to stimulate activity through the generation of new ideas.

6

The Hong Kong experience

Why Hong Kong?

Why should the experience of Hong Kong figure prominently in this book on self-access? One answer is that any case study will have to refer to particular people in a particular place, at a particular time, and that the teaching of English at the Chinese University in Hong Kong in 1992 is in itself a particularly interesting case study. However, there are at least three other reasons:

First, it is a question of shared experience. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) set up an Independent Learning Centre (ILC) for languages which opened in the autumn of 1993. A programme for planning the unit was set up. Philip Riley was invited to visit the University on several occasions to discuss some of the concepts of self-access with the staff. Preparing the teachers for self-access and convincing them that it is a step forward, as Herbert Pierson stresses, is more than half the battle won. As a result, a strong contingent from the English Language Teaching Unit due to support the Centre came to the Cambridge Conference in December '92.

Secondly, the amount and range of topics tackled and investigated in so little time is remarkable and encouraging for any beginner in the field: learner training, learner support systems, use of computers for communication, materials. None of the issues raised in the earlier sections of this book seems to have been beyond this team of young and enthusiastic lecturers committed to the experiment and determined to make it a success, and this in a cultural environment said to favour collective rather than individualistic views of social relations!

Thirdly, the two main themes of this volume figure prominently in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the sheer quantity of equipment and software available (Linda Mak) would make many people in Europe dream. On the other, it is abundantly clear from the papers of Bea Ma, Emma Poon and Eva Lai in particular, that no amount of hardware, software, or indeed language teaching can open psychological access to learners of English unless they themselves bring down the barriers they have built up against English. The Independent Learning Centre offers a way of identifying, acknowledging and acting upon these internal barriers.

The editor believes it is always beneficial to look at what is happening far away; the physical distance helps one to look at familiar issues with the appropriate objectivity. In the same way as our colleagues from the Chinese University have been observing the way a number of European Centres operate, we can gain a lot from focusing on how they have solved a number of problems.

Facts about Hong Kong

The main language spoken in Hong Kong is Cantonese, a dialect also spoken in Southern China. Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese (or Putonghua) are tone languages but they are not mutually intelligible although the same writing system - with characters - is being used for both. English and Mandarin are the two official languages of Hong Kong. Often it is not realised that many Hong Kong people are Cantonese-English bilingual and that learning Mandarin amounts to becoming trilingual and represents a considerable effort. Apart from the University of Hong Kong, there are two Universities: the Chinese University and the University of Science and Technology, and two polytechnics: The Hong Kong Polytechnic and The City Polytechnic of Hong Kong (both soon to be upgraded to universities). All have Language Centres which, primarily, support the learning of English as a second language. English is the main teaching medium in higher education, although the use of Mandarin is encouraged at the Chinese University. It is not yet clear what the linguistic policy concerning the use of Cantonese in Hong Kong and the teaching of English in schools will be when the British colony is handed back to the Chinese in 1997.

Suggested readers' guide

This detailed case study of setting up a self-access language learning centre provides readers with an overview of self-access in practice: key topics, issues and questions and how one group of committed professional addressed them.

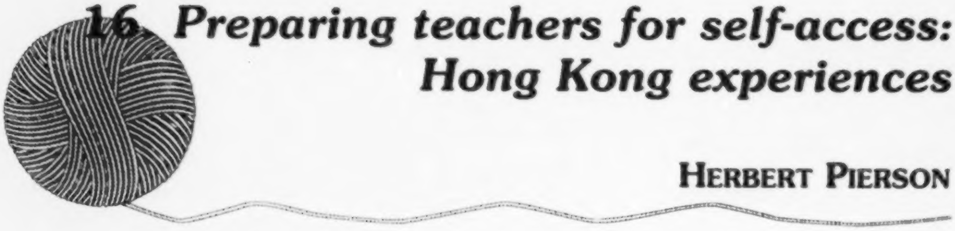
Access point

This section is a useful access point for any readers with time to learn, read around and think about the issues who prefer to move from the practical to the theoretical.

Suggested follow-up

Readers may want to turn to Section 1 for a theoretical framework.

- *Teachers/advisers*
  Will benefit from the whole section.
- *Librarians*
  Will find chapter 19 particularly useful
- *Policy makers*
  Read chapter 16 then complete with case study chapter 15 in Section 5.



16. Preparing teachers for self-access: Hong Kong experiences

HERBERT PIERSON

Once you've solved the people problem, you've solved most of your problems.
Dale Carnegie

In the fall of 1991, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) became committed to the goal of self-access language learning as a means of enhancing the English competence of its undergraduates. To attain this goal it was decided to use part of an indicated government grant for language to set up a self-access language learning facility, which has become known as the Independent Learning Centre (ILC). As the initiative for this project came from the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU), teachers of the ELTU have been responsible for planning and running the ILC. The ILC was formally opened on October 30th, 1993. Although the ILC has been set up for English teaching, it is hoped that the other languages taught at CUHK - Chinese, Japanese, French, German and Italian - would in the future be accommodated by the ILC.

Hong Kong is fertile ground to introduce self-access educational innovations for a number of reasons. Chinese communities traditionally value literacy, learning, and education. Thus, in CUHK undergraduates, we have students who are academically disciplined and eager to learn. Because of Hong Kong's present prosperity, ample government funding for education, particularly higher education, has been forthcoming. It should be noted that adequate funding is a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful educational innovation. Innovation must also have the support and enthusiasm of teachers and students.

Although one of the main goals of self-access is increased independence from teachers, it was the individual classroom teachers themselves whom we discovered would be crucial in determining the success of the self-access initiative. It is teacher understanding and enthusiasm, coming from their grassroots experiences, which must be secured before any project of this nature can progress and succeed. While the ILC was in its initial planning phase, a number of teacher problems were identified. These problems are discussed below.

Perceived problems with self-access learning

One of the major difficulties in making the move from a traditional classroom-based language programme to a self-access learning programme was how to persuade teachers, both Chinese and non-Chinese, that this shift would benefit them and their students, even though it would necessitate some change in their role and function. We argued that putting the responsibility for learning more into the hands of the students would result in freeing teachers to interact more creatively and closely with students on a more individual, personal basis.

Our teachers were nevertheless rightly concerned that the concept of self-access could, in insidious ways, minimise their role and function in the learning process. We were quick to point out that in self-access the teacher not only had an increased positive role, but self-access learning also reinforced the centrality of the teacher in learning. However, this role would naturally be recognised in part as qualitatively different from the traditional classroom role. Self-access would give the teacher time to pursue the more creative aspects of teaching by promoting attention to students on a more personal basis, especially through the language counselling services.

Another group of teachers felt that the ILC would increase what they perceived was already a heavy teaching workload. It was pointed out that this was certainly not the intent of those who planned and set up the ILC. If it unexpectedly increased the quality and duration of teacher interaction with students, this could not of itself be such a bad outcome for a committed professional, However, such an answer is far too idealistic and not very satisfactory. A serious point was underlying this concern. In any traditional teaching department like the ELTU, which adds a self-learning component, it is important that teachers feel they are getting a fair distribution of the departmental workload and not being unduly burdened. Ideally, one would like to make commitment to self-learning in any department voluntary for the obvious reasons that such a policy makes for goodwill.

Some teachers expressed the concern that, with the introduction of self-access, they were being asked to do something they were not qualified, trained or interested in doing, e.g. materials writing and adaptation, audio-visual work, computerised instruction, language counselling, etc. These are legitimate concerns. It is in the best interest of staff morale that teachers function only in those activities where they feel comfortable and competent. One must realise that every department has an unevenly distributed pool of talents and interests. The skilled administrator, therefore, must attempt to exploit this unevenly distributed pool for the benefit of the self-access centre.

Other teachers voiced their concern that self-access might provide for less student-teacher interaction as CALL (computer-assisted language learning) would be introduced and was thought would take over many teaching functions. Firstly, although multimedia CALL applications are becoming a feature of a modern self-access facility, they are not the key feature. Secondly, anybody who has worked with CALL knows from experience that the computer has limitations and can never replace the live teacher. The computer only complements what the teacher does, whether it be classroom teaching or learner counselling.

Finally, there was a small group of teachers who sincerely felt that self-access was being supported by administrators who were intent on saving money by hiring fewer teachers or not replacing teachers. Although in the long run, self-access would be cost-effective, the initial capital outlays involved in setting up such a facility are considerable. Secondly, the rather negative viewpoint (albeit from a minority) attributing such motives to administrators is not justified, as there was institutional awareness that self-access is not a means to reduce teaching staff. A self-access facility cannot operate without teachers.

Teacher roles defined

We could not expect to disabuse teachers completely of their anxieties and fears, but we were able to counter these obstacles in several ways. One was to provide staff training and education through attendance at seminars and workshops, both locally and overseas. The presence of several prominent consultants, including Professor Philip Riley and Professor Mary Willes, has contributed immensely to getting staff to understand and appreciate the nature of self-access learning and the teacher's primary role in it. Secondly, we have tried to involve as many teachers as possible in a responsible way in planning and running the ILC. To facilitate teacher participation, we defined this participation in operational role terms. These role definitions were very important for moving the ILC forward and for gaining individual teacher acceptance.

In order to prepare teachers for their new roles in self-access, we gave a group of volunteer teachers from the ELTU specific roles in the ILC. These roles are briefly described below. They are the following: 1. the Director; 2. the language counselling service co-ordinator; 3. the co-ordinator for audio-visual applications; 4. the co-ordinator for computer applications; 5. the co-ordinator for action research; and 6. the co-ordinator for materials development.

The **Director** is ideally a senior teacher who is in charge of the day-to-day running of the ILC. The Director is responsible for doing the overall planning and budgeting for the ILC. The Director sees that the ILC is adequately staffed and operates smoothly. One of the Director's main tasks is to ensure that the various areas of the ILC function as efficiently as possible.

The **language counselling service co-ordinator** is a teacher responsible for planning the induction and training of undergraduates in using the ILC. This teacher is responsible for setting up the programme for language counselling.

The **co-ordinator for audio-visual applications** is a teacher who is in charge of audio-visual resources and for developing self-access applications of these resources - audio and video tapes, laser discs, radio, local and satellite TV broadcasts, etc. Staff requests for audio-visual hardware and software are channelled through this person. In technical matters this teacher will be assisted by a technician.

The **co-ordinator for computer applications** is a teacher responsible for developing the pedagogical application of computers in self-access learning. Staff requests for computer hardware and software are channelled through this teacher.

The **co-ordinator for action research** is a teacher who is responsible for initiating research projects directly related to self-access learning. In the first instance these will be pilot learner training projects and also questionnaire-based research projects whose goal is to find out general student attitudes toward self-access learning. Later on this research will also include the routine monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the ILC programmes.

The **co-ordinator for materials development** is a teacher responsible for ensuring that the ILC provides students with a real learning choice by providing self-access materials and pathways. Assisted by the other teachers, this teacher is responsible for selecting commercial and non-commercial materials and adapting them for self-access learning. All requests for learning material are channelled through this teacher.

Conclusion

This group of teacher co-ordinators, supported by a professional librarian, a technician, a clerk, and a teaching assistant, has now evolved into a formal management committee, which provides all kinds of insight and information about the running of the ILC. The initial success and smooth running of the ILC are indeed a credit to the co-operative spirit and enthusiasm of this group of teachers and the support staff. In summary, we have found that a very good way to prepare traditional classroom teachers for self-access is to involve them as soon as possible, and in truly responsible ways, with the planning, developing and running of the self-access facility.

17. A study of independent learning: the learner training programme at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

BEATRICE MA

This pilot programme is an effort to experiment with the independent learning approach for mastering listening, speaking, reading and writing in English. The programme aims at providing the language strategies for mastering the four language skills and redefining the teaching and learning roles in the process of acquiring English.

The nature of the learners

The subjects of this pilot learner training programme are the Science undergraduates in the First Year English course (FYE) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). There are 30 subjects and they are divided into two groups.

The subjects, like the average students in Hong Kong, have been learning English for fourteen years since kindergarten. English language is much emphasised in the curriculum and, from primary to secondary schools, more than six hours per week of English language teaching contact is provided to the average student. While the quantity of classroom contact is abundant, the quality of the contact is undesirably poor. In primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, an average of forty students are usually accommodated in one class with one teacher in charge of the English language subject.

The subjects of this study are all academically strong as they have achieved good enough academic grades to be accepted by one of the three local universities. However, their English proficiency is considered to be weak after being assessed by a placement test conducted by the English Language Teaching Unit. They are then required to take the First Year English course (FYE). Apart from their unsatisfactory results in English, the subjects have acquired effective study skills to achieve the academic results they now have for all other academic subjects, including their major subjects.

The subjects find using English confidently and improving it difficult. Lack of confidence and effective methods for improving their English appear to be the greatest handicap.

The objectives of the learner training programme at CUHK

The learner training programme follows five guidelines:

1. **Choice** - The self-access approach offers an alternative to the traditional ways of learning. Flexibility is also a very important element. Students are given a choice in their approaches to learning English.
2. **Responsibility** - Learners are given a choice and by opting for this choice they have to be responsible for their decision. They are encouraged to take charge of their own study, i.e. the planning of the learning steps and the choice of learning materials. Instead of relying on the teacher's assessment and judgement of their language performance, they monitor their own progress.

3 **Negotiation** - The learners assume a new role in their learning experience. They are asked to participate in the planning and design of their study. The teacher/learner relationship takes on a new face. Instead of dictating what and how to learn, the teacher provides more background/descriptive information about the English language and advice on developing learning strategies in order to promote a sense of language awareness and to help learners build a realistic expectation for their language performance. The learners can make active decisions about the choice of practice activity and evaluation.

4 **Discovery** - The learners in their new role are encouraged to discover areas in which they are interested for practice.

5 **Teacher's role** - The teacher plays a new role in the process of learning/teaching. The teacher will become the counsellor and the helper instead of the dictator of learning inputs and the only judge and assessor for learners' outputs.

Description of the learner training programme

The sources that the learner training programme relies on are as follows:

- *Learning to learn English* by Gail Ellis and Barbara Sinclair, Cambridge University Press (1989);
- handouts from CRAPEL;
- *College thinking* by Jack W Meiland, Penguin (1981);
- a short story *Fifty-first dragon* by Heywood Broun in the Great Books Reading Scheme.

The training programme consists of two components: the general orientation component and the strategy component, covering only listening and speaking in this paper.

THE GENERAL ORIENTATION COMPONENT

The learners were given the following questionnaire to fill in.

Please answer the following questions as they may help your course instructor to know you better

1 What do you expect to learn from this course?

2 What kind of activities would you like to include in class?

3 How many hours do you plan to spend on improving your English?

4 What do you like and hate most about English?

5 What do you like and hate most about English classes?

6 Would you like to take part in other language activities outside your classroom? Any suggestion(s)?

7 In your opinion, what makes a good language learner?

8 What makes a good language teacher?

Thank you

This is the first attempt to help them focus on their needs. The last two questions ask the learners to identify the qualities of a good language learner and a good language teacher. The majority of the learners tend to believe that learning has to take place in a classroom setting with the teacher playing the central role. They all think that if they pay more attention in class and concentrate better, their English will be improved. It is a consensus among the learners that a good language teacher has to be kind, understanding and patient. From the initial responses, it is clear that the learners prefer to follow the teacher-oriented approach in the course of language learning. They expect a lot from their teacher and they assume a passive and receptive role in the process of learning.

A tactic was adopted to 'decondition' these learners. They were given a reading assignment. An article entitled 'The difference between high school and college', taken from chapter 2 of *College thinking*, by Jack W Meiland, and a short story, *Fifty first dragon* by Heywood Broun, were distributed to the learners as a grounding exercise. They were then asked to make a summary of their readings and report it to class. The literature provides some insight into a different perspective to learning and teaching. The first article puts the learners into a more realistic framework for expectations of their study and the second short story brings out the importance of self-responsibility and self-confidence in achieving any success. The learners were then divided into groups of four or five to discuss the following set of questions.

Discuss the following topics and give a class report

1. What is your attitude towards your study?
    - Why do you study?
    - How do you study?
2. What do you think of teacher's guidance?
    - Do you need it? How much?
    - If not, then how do you help yourself?
3. Does class participation help you in any way to study?
    - If yes, in what ways?
    - If no, why not?
4. What do you think of extra-curricular activities?
    - How much should you get involved?
    - How would you strike a balance between your study and these activities?
5. What is your ultimate goal(s) for studying?
    - Career? Money? Grades? Knowledge? Self-improvement?
6. What is your responsibility for your study?
    - Define your own responsibility?
    - How much should you rely on your teacher(s)?

The discussion results showed that students are aware that active participation, self-reliance and a better definition of study goals are necessary and beneficial to their study. They were then asked to assess their language learning experience by completing two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was designed by Ellis and Sinclair in *Learning styles*, edited by Duda and Riley. The other was taken from *Teaching how to learn*, by Ken Willing. After identifying what type of language learner they were, the students were asked to go back to their group and negotiate among themselves what language skills they needed most urgently and rank these skills. Then, as a group, they decided what kinds of activities they would like to do for language learning.

After much discussion and negotiation, the 30 subjects agreed on the following order of activities:

- listening;
- speaking;
- reading;
- writing.

THE LISTENING AND SPEAKING TRAINING COMPONENT

The major source of inputs comes from *Learning to learn English* by Ellis and Sinclair (Cambridge University Press, 1989). Other language consolidation exercises and practice activities are taken from the teaching resources of the English Language Teaching Unit at CUHK.

Description of learners' practice activities

The following are practice activities for consolidating the learning strategies the learners acquired in the training programme.

Listening

- Listening to news in English on television with comparison of the news in Chinese for checking.
- Learners' design their own practice activity (see Appendix, p145).
- Activity update worksheet.

Speaking

- Pronunciation demonstration tape and worksheets/tongue-twisters worksheet.
- Making a recording of a picture description.
- Making a recording of 'Just a minute'.
- Presentation of term project.

Assessment and evaluation

Assessment and evaluation consisted of both teacher's and learners' input. The input given by the students was very close to the teacher's. In her written report the teacher gave her comments, suggestions for improvement and her grade for each group's practice activity. The groups used the following discussion topics as guidelines for their own assessment and evaluation of both their own work and others. The teacher and the groups then decided on the final grade for each practice activity.

Discussion topics for group self-evaluation

1 How do you evaluate each practice activity, your own and others?
  - Have you/they achieved the objective?
  - How effective is the practice activity?
  - How interesting is the practice activity?

2 What have you learned in the process of preparing for the practice activity?
  - Any language items? Any new words or expressions? Any learning strategy?
  - From the difficulty in your preparation?
  - Your anticipation of problems in learning?
  - The reaction from your learners?

3 How do you assess your/their work?
  - How much weight do you put in product? In process?
  - How would you assess your performance when you did the other activities?
  - How would you assess your own activity?
  - What grade would you give to your group and what about the other groups?

4 How do you evaluate your partner's participation in the activity?
  - How much have they contributed to the participation?
  - How much work have they taken up? Describe the division of labour.
  - How would you improve participation and division of labour?

By involving the learners in the process of designing practice activities and in assessment and evaluation, the teacher passed on responsibility to the learners. This sense of trust and confidence in the learners has ignited their own sense of self-respect and they are more ready to take charge of their own study.

General findings

After the trial period of three months, there are interesting findings from the learners' responses and the teacher's observation. These findings indicate a direction in coping with the learning problems of the learners.

Fear - There is a genuine fear of English. Much has to be done to lift this psychological block in order to develop a healthy attitude towards learning English and a realistic expectation of their performance.

An absence of language awareness - The learners have abundant knowledge of grammatical rules but very little idea of the special features of spoken English. For example, they have no idea about the stress pattern in English nor the distinctive features of its pronunciation. This explains why they were so fearful of listening and speaking English. They have no realistic understanding or fundamental knowledge of the distinctive features of the English language. They are also reluctant to make constructive use of their mother tongue in their study of English. By contrasting the articulation methods of English with their mother tongue, they could have a better mastery of the pronunciation of English words.

Unrealistic expectations of their performance - The learners achieved a very high standard in their academic study and they expected the same results from their language work. They also expected to achieve good results over a short period of time.

An absence of effective strategies for learning English - The learners unwisely applied their usual strategies for other academic subjects to learning English. Methods such as memorisation and listing of main points are used for learning English. Their demand for a large bank of new words and their insistence on listening to every single word in a conversation are instances which reflect their traditional approach to study and their basic misunderstanding about how to learn English listening and speaking effectively. Moreover the learners overemphasise the product in the course of the learning, and if the product proves to be unsatisfactory or poor, their sense of defeat is intensified. Given the extremely competitive Hong Kong education system with its overt emphasis on examination results, learners are misled into using the same tactics for language learning since they have no access to other more appropriate and effective strategies.

Short-term developments for learner training at CUHK

The teacher's experience with this pilot self-access programme has indicated several important directions for future development and refinement. These are as follows:

1. It is necessary to shorten the strategy training time. A more structured timetable should be set.
2. Modification and adaptation of the present programmes are crucial to help learners focus on their needs and develop an effective strategy for learning English. Materials relevant to their experience and needs should be used.
3. It is of utmost importance to develop pathways and an orientation programme for using the self-access facilities.

4 It is necessary to explore more possibilities for developing English learning strategies. More research in exploring the learning styles of the Hong Kong learners and the development of a bank of learning materials to facilitate the self-access learning mode at CUHK is urgent.

Conclusion

The self-access approach is a possible alternative to the conventional approach for university students in Hong Kong. It has offered some insights into the problems of the pilot group of language learners at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The programme has achieved several important outcomes for this group of learners:

1. It has provided the learners with some essential and fundamental knowledge of the way the English language works.
2. It has demystified learning English and helped students develop realistic expectations.
3. It has shown them ways to formulate effective strategies for learning English and take charge of their own study.

Appendix: example of a listening sheet designed by a learner

Purpose:
The main purpose of this programme is to train our skill of listening.

Instructions:

1 Read the passage before you watch the video and get a general idea first.

2 Watch the video again and fill in the gaps with the words given below.

Heart break

There are _____ people who have taken the heart valves in an _____ Manufacturing Company, this company have introduced two types of _____ concave heart valves: the _____ heart valves will break one day and _____ ones are a _____ because they will break anytime. Eric McGills, a 34-year-old _____ have put a _____ heart valve in his body. The American lady, Elaine, has put on _____ and _____ to alert people in case the valve _____.

Keywords

fractured
Australian
bracelet

American
necklace
artificial

60
80,000 70

time-bomb

3 Listen to the accents and say who is speaking with what accent:

American accents

Australian accents

Keywords

Eric
Bob's wife

Elaine
The narrator

George

18. *Keeping contact with learners*

EVA FUNG-KUEN LAI

The following shows how findings from surveys or feedback from learners can indicate to us different ways of responding to their needs. The learner support system consisted of needs analysis, journal writing and evaluation. Needs analysis is taken as part of learner support because data collected can inform teachers. Journal writing is seen as learner support since it solicits learners' response to various learning modes or different materials and in turn can help teachers to give appropriate advice. Evaluation gives an overall picture of the usage of the facilities for steering and monitoring the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Needs analysis as part of the support system

Two types of ILC related needs analysis have been conducted. Macro-analysis looks at the needs of the whole student body at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) while micro-analysis looks at the needs of an individual student.

Two macro-needs surveys have been carried out so far among different target groups with the same aim: to find out what the ILC should initially focus on when we prepare for its opening in a year's time. Since there is a time constraint, we would like to acquire materials/facilities most students claim that they want to use first.

NEEDS EXPRESSED BY UNDERGRADUATES

The first analysis (Lai and Mak, 1992) was conducted among undergraduates of CUHK with returns from 10% of the student body. It was found that more than one-third of the respondents considered the ILC a facilitator of English learning - a great boost to the morale of the teachers who helped set up the ILC! When asked which area they found most difficult in their English learning, they came up with speaking (53%) and vocabulary (53%) followed by listening (36%) and writing (28%). This could give teachers an indication of the quantity of material to acquire in different skill areas.

Respondents also showed that they favoured listening and speaking materials with the theme of social interaction. In fact, they wanted to have interaction with fellow students rather than work on their own. To cater for the needs of learners, conversation groups will be set up where they can freely converse with others in English. This may sound trivial, but there is a need for learners to come at a certain time to a certain room in the ILC in order to talk in English. The reason is that learners find it very embarrassing to talk to others in English in a monolingual society like Hong Kong where 98% of the population is Chinese.

A high percentage (84%) of respondents wanted teacher guidance rather than independent work and they said they would not use the ILC during examinations. This sounds contrary to the idea of the ILC and it means that a lot of work must be done to instill the concept of autonomous learning in our students. But as a short-term goal, the learners' needs must be satisfied first. Hence there will be counsellors to talk to learners individually about their learning problems. Also, there will be a writing centre where tutors will work one-on-one with learners to help them improve their academic writing.

The first analysis, conducted a year before the opening of the ILC, has given useful information to reveal or to confirm the needs of the learners and to suggest what should be included in the planning stage of the ILC.

PREFERRED ACTIVITIES AT THE ILC

Following the first survey, I tried to differentiate the needs of the more proficient English learners from those of the low proficiency group - hoping to yield data for the levels of materials to acquire or prepare.

I used four statements to solicit views from learners:

1 I like to learn
   (a) general English
   (b) business English
   (c) English for studies
   (d) English for social interaction

2 I like to practise
   (a) reading
   (b) writing
   (c) speaking
   (d) listening in the ILC

3 I like to have more
   (a) cassette tapes
   (b) video tapes
   (c) films
   (d) satellite TV programmes
   (e) story books
   (f) books on English studies
   (g) magazines
   (h) computer software on English studies in the ILC

4 I like to have
   (a) conversation sessions
   (b) a writing clinic
   (c) teacher consultation
   (d) English activities
      e.g. language games, in the ILC

There were 100 respondents in the high proficiency group and 134 in the low proficiency group. Those who got grades A, B or C in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (a public exam, equivalent to the GCSE in the UK) were considered high, and those who got grades D or E were considered low. Both groups were asked to circle two answers for each of the above statements.

For statement 1, both groups chose social interaction as first choice. For the second choice the high group wanted business English while the low group opted for general English.

For statement 2, there was an overwhelming demand for speaking practice. As speaking is a two-way communicative activity, special arrangements must be made to cater for these students and we have decided to set up conversation groups at the ILC.

For statement 3, again, both groups opted for films as first choice and video tapes as second choice. This has been borne out by actual usage data in the Audio-visual Centre (details under Evaluation, p150).

For statement 4, the two choices were the same in both groups - conversation sessions and English activities such as language games.

Responses to these four statements were similar to the findings of the first survey.

Contrary to expectation, there was not much difference between the high and low proficiency groups, which can make materials acquisition easier at the ILC.

The macro-analyses described above would be useful at the planning stage or during periodic reviews of the ILC. To support an individual learner, we need only a micro-needs analysis. I like to use a mini-survey for this purpose because it can give enough information within a short period of time and it does not involve any high-tech at all. My mini-survey was tried out in class sessions as the ILC was not yet opened at that time. I asked my group of learners to write down in paragraph form answers to these questions:

1. How are you learning English?
2. What is your weakest skill in English?
3. How much time do you intend to spend on practising English?
4. What is the title of your favourite English book?
5. Why do you like this book?

I could judge their level of English by their writing. I could find out their perceived weakness, study plan and reading interest before I talked with them individually about independent learning.

Journal writing as part of the support system

For this term, I am taking a group of nineteen students for general English and I plan to encourage them to use the ILC when it opens in October. To prepare them to take up the responsibility of self-instruction, I have tried to give them different experiences of learning English. In order to communicate with them individually, I asked them to keep a journal and record their feelings towards what was done in our meetings.

For the language learning experience session, I took into class a box of Scrabble, a box of sentence games for juniors, worksheets on matching newspaper headlines with the summaries, some English newspapers (for silent reading), some short poems (for reading aloud) and a tape recorder with the story of *Ugly duckling* for them to listen to. I asked the learners to work in groups of four and I made sure they had all worked on the different materials. Later in the week, I read in my learners' journals the type of activity they preferred.

Then I talked with each learner in turn and worked out a learning plan that might suit his/her needs. I continued with this counselling process by sharing ideas with them through journal writing. I am going to quote a few journal entries of two of my learners to show how the counselling works. To keep authenticity, their grammatical errors are not corrected, but it is not too difficult to follow what they meant.

LEARNER ONE

> 22nd September 1993
>
> Today Miss and me discuss on how to improve my English level. We make many suggestions. At last we get a result. I decide to do two things in the coming days. First, I would read an article per day. I would find it in SCMP (Youth Post) in my hostel, and try to find some words or vocabulary for me to memorise as possible as I can. Then, I promise that I would listening half an hour radio daily, I would choose the News. I think start to do everything is difficult, but I would try my best!

> 10th October 1993
>
> I've read newspaper once a day. After reading several articles, I find myself cannot understand all the articles fully. Although all the words in a sentence I have already know the meaning, the sentence's meaning cannot be find by me. This is a big problem when I read the newspaper.

After I read the above entry, I suggested to this learner that he could borrow *Sentence combining* (Strong, 1983) and work on sentence structures. He did and wrote this entry later.

> 18 October 1993
>
> I've find the exercise of combining sentences very interesting. I very like to do this type of exercise. I want to do more in future. I also want to do esercises of preposition. I hope we can do it later. In the combining exercise, we always use the word 'whihc, and' to combine the sentence. Is there any word we can do it that make the sentence more beautiful?

I responded by suggesting to him that he can work on certain chapters of Strong's book (op cit) which show different ways of sentence combining.

LEARNER TWO

> 23rd September 1993
>
> In the coming three or four weeks, I' ll focus on improving my listening skills. I planned to improve my listening, reading, writing and speaking one by one. Fore every month I' ll focus on one skill. At the end of the first term, I' ll check out how much I' ll have improved. Then, I' ll review what I' ve done to improve my English and decide what shall I do in the second term. This is my plan. I hope I can follow it and I' ll try my best to do it.
>
> At present, I recorded news from TV and listened to it to follow my first step. I could understand about 40 per cent after I' ve listened to it four to five times. The local news were easier to understand than the world news. Apart from this, I' ll try other ways to improve my listening skills. I am looking for suitable methods.

Obviously, learner two is more proficient in English and he is quite systematic in his plans. He is also motivated and takes initiatives. I put encouraging remarks in his journal entries and he seems to like them. These are two other entries of his.

> 27th September 1993
>
> I was keeping on doing listening exercise about one hour per day for a week. It's easier to understand the news than before. But that is not enough. I' ll go on for more time.

> 15th October 1993
>
> Last time, I listened to Elvi's songs and I found it was boring. Yesterday, I tried to find another singers. At last, I found a disc which is entitled Yesterday once more. Yes. I loved this song. This time, I felt completely different. I could understand the songs on the disc and I enjoyed the songs. But I had left after about half an hour because I had a general education lesson in the following time. Yes. I should choose songs but not singers. I should choose those which I had heard before or at least I had heard from radio or television and I was interested in it. So it would not be boring any more. I' ll try to do it more in the future.

In the words of the learners, we can see how they are progressing. It seems very useful to respond to learners by giving suggestions to learners like Learner one or by just giving encouraging remarks to independent ones like Learner two.

When the counselling service is set up after the opening of the ILC, the exchange of ideas can be done in a face-to-face interview. But the use of the journal is still there. The learners can practise writing in a true communicative situation. They can pen down their thoughts whenever they like. The writing process can also help them to reflect on their learning strategies. With the counselling service in operation, the learners can show their journals to the counsellors when they see them in follow-up meetings. If the situation allows, the journal entries can also be sent through e-mail to the counsellors.

Evaluation as part of the support system

Evaluation can be seen as a continuous macro-analysis of needs because it gives information about the usage of different facilities at the ILC. By checking such information, teachers can decide on changes in utilisation of materials or facilities to suit the learners. I would like to use our Audio-visual (AV) Centre[1] evaluation as an example to show how this feedback can in turn affect activities organised in future.

When learners use the AV Centre, they have to enter data in a form, the headings of which are shown below:

Name of student: ____________________
Year and major of student: ____________________
Time spent in AV Centre: ____________________
Reason: own enjoyment or class assignment ____________________
Title of film or programme: ____________________
Medium: video or laser ____________________
Interest value: 1 (boring) ... 5 (interesting) ____________________
Language difficulty: 1 (difficult) ... 5 (easy) ____________________
Usefulness for learning English: 1 (no use) ... 5 (useful) ____________________

---

[1] The AV Centre was a temporary establishment for learners to use audio-visual materials in a self-access mode before the opening of the ILC.

Evaluation can also confirm the reliability of needs analysis. In the analysis of preferred activities at the ILC (p147), statement 3 showed that learners like films and video tapes best. Data collected in the AV Centre confirmed this. For instance, between 1 March and 17 April, there was a total number of 852 users: of those, 558 attended for class assignments and 270 for their own enjoyment. The total amount of time learners spent at the AV Centre was 67,275 minutes, which means on average the centre was 50% full during the said period.

An analysis of the evaluation data can help teachers to decide on what type of activities to offer in the centre. The learners reported that they like conversation groups and language activities. When so many learners like watching films it is useful to have discussions about films or role-play on certain parts of a film. Data from the evaluation table could come into use again because obviously it would be more appealing to learners if we organise a session to talk about a film that has been seen by quite a number of them already, for example, in our case, *Amazing stories*, *Citizen Kane*, *Gallipoli* or *Love and death*.

Such data can also help teachers in material development. For example, 25% of our users found the AV materials useful, 35% found them easy and 42% (class work) to 59% (own enjoyment) found the materials interesting. Teachers responsible for AV materials can be assured that they have got more or less the right films or videos for the learners. If they want to further examine the rating of a particular film, they can easily check it up. If they feel a certain film is good, but their learners find it too difficult, they can design a study guide to go with that film to enable the weaker learners to benefit from it. If they find a video is favoured by a lot of learners, they can mark out part of it and turn that into interactive work since our learners ask for speaking and listening practice at the ILC. If, unfortunately, learners did not like a certain film at all, it can be taken off the shelf to leave room for popular ones. All in all, evaluation can point to teachers the direction to follow in future.

I have shown how we make use of needs analysis, journal writing and evaluation as a kind of learner support. By keeping contact with learners, by responding to their needs and by monitoring the efficiency of usage at the ILC, we are looking forward to better English learning.

19. *Using computers for authentic communication*

LINDA MAK

The visions for computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) can be summarised with the following phrases: high-tech, multimedia, international, and instructional - as well as communication-oriented. In this paper, I will first discuss the factors we considered in designing the computer system for the Centre, then will describe the ILC link, the Centre's electronic bulletin board system. I will end by showing how our task-based, problem solving approach to computer-assisted language learning underpins the Centre's software acquisition policy. Being a language teacher with very limited knowledge on the technical side, I will focus mainly on the pedagogical considerations.

For computer-assisted language learning, the advantage was having to plan everything from scratch. The disadvantages, however, were:

1 The computers on campus were decentralised. We had to deal with the technical matters ourselves including configuration of the computer system, cabling, etc.

2 Our colleagues are all language teachers without much technical expertise, not to mention knowledge of designing, setting up and maintaining a computer system. The computer services centre and an honorary adviser were our only source of information, advice and technical support. We had to fight for quite a long time before we were allowed to employ a temporary full-time computer technician.

Where to start?

STUDENTS' NEEDS AS A PRIMARY FACTOR

We started with a needs analysis to find out what our learners needed. We needed to know what domain of the language was most relevant to their communicative needs, General English, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes, what their motivations were (language learning practice or leisure) and what their priorities were in terms of skills training and topics of interest.

We did a survey on students' needs with a colleague at the CUHK in May 1991. We distributed 700 questionnaires to students taking our ELT courses and 611 responded. The results of the survey can be summarised as follows.

EAP is the least desired among the four options. Students surveyed expressed keen interest to learn independently. When asked the skill area they would like to study in the ILC, one-third chose English for Social Interaction, whereas 25% chose General English. Over half of the students said they wished to improve their speaking skills. 67% of the students said they needed Business English. 33% of the students ranked Current Affairs as their most desired topic while 27% were keen on social issues.

INSTITUTIONAL NEEDS AND CURRENT AVAILABILITY OF COMPUTER FACILITIES AS A SECONDARY FACTOR

We next analysed our institution's needs and the major tasks we wanted the computer facilities to complete. The following possibilities were considered:

- CALL (computerised language practice exercises)
- On-line catalogue of learning materials
- On-line information retrieval system
- Booking of materials/equipment
  A computerised booking system for video recorders, computer workstations, CD-ROM drives, satellite TV workstations, etc will not only free the clerk for other jobs and provide a record of user rate, but also emphasise the meaning of self-access.
- Electronic information bank
  - Centre guide:
    opening hours, services provided, loan/reservation system, study pathways, etc
  - Electronic bulletin:
    for promoting new learning materials, workshops, functions, centre news
  - User manuals
- Internet services
  International newsgroups, databases, computer conferencing
- On-line consultation
  This may take the form of an e-mail account or a centre mailbox (such as the Professor English Mailbox) for learners to direct individual questions to the counsellors and counsellors to provide feedback in writing, as well as a reference tool such as an on-line dictionary, databases, hypertext, etc.
- Research
  - to record user rate and pathways of study
  - to record the progress of a learner, if there are any computerised entry and exit tests
  - to record the electronic communication between learners and counsellors
- Electronic communication with other centres/departments, e.g. referral services

OTHER MAJOR FACTORS AND/OR CONSTRAINTS TO CONSIDER

Financial

We had to consider not only the initial cost of setting up the system, which came from a block grant, but also the running costs (disks, backups, toner, paper for printing, etc) and regular maintenance costs.

Technical

What kind of system would best serve our needs?
- BBC? There are a lot of good educational software packages but the computer is not widely used in countries outside the UK.
- IBM compatible? It is widely used around the world with a lot of good application software packages, but it requires substantial computer knowledge to set up, to manage and to train the users (both staff and learners).
- Macintosh? It is user-friendly, easy to learn, to use and manage, the built-in graphics and audio quality are good for multimedia work; but the hardware is much more expensive and some CALL packages are not readily accessible in countries outside the USA.

Network or not?
- Having stand-alone computers with different programs for each station is workable but not systematic, nor economical - it is a waste to have the same program taking

up a lot of disk space in each station; update is time-consuming too.
- Networking, not only internally but also with the campus network, has a lot of advantages; however, it is more expensive and difficult to manage.

Administrative
We had to decide not only on whether to invite companies to tender or not, but also on the investment of staff hours and salary. If the computers were to be networked with the Internet, we would have to tackle the issues of data security, membership/ authorised users, network traffic and administration, too.

Manpower
- Can language teachers look after the system on their own?
- Is there a computer support person available?

The advisers can only provide information and help with the installation of the system. Student helpers can merely help with the manual writing/printing and low-level tasks and they have to work under the supervision of computer professionals. A full-time system manager is needed to manage, develop the system and to develop the software and courseware.

Timing
It is not uncommon for one to wait several weeks for the items ordered to arrive. And it takes two to three months for the whole system to be installed.

Despite the expenditure and staffing constraints, we chose to have a network so as to enjoy the enormous resources the Internet offers. There are currently fifteen computers (three IBM 386s, a Centris and eleven LCIIs and IIIs) and four CD-ROM drives for student use. One IBM is reserved for stand-alone CALL programs, two for the Centre on-line catalogue and the Centre BBS (bulletin board system). The Macs are for CALL and are arranged on two hexagonal tables with a mobile partition between each computer so that students may choose to work alone or in pairs. All the computers are networked and linked with the campus network, thus e-mail and Internet services are available too. If CALL is popular and effective among our students, we will consider expanding the IBMs for CALL at a later stage.

The pop-up menu of the ILC computers includes:
- ILC Link - a bulletin board system
- ILC on-line catalogue
- centre guide: opening hours, regulations and policies, other services such as counselling service
- booking system and loan/return system
- activities/new materials
- file transfer protocols (FTPs)
- Computer Centre utilities
- others (e.g. newsgroups)

ILC Link - The Centre's bulletin board system

We believe that the computer can and should serve both instructional and communicative purposes. CALL should not be limited to computerised language practice exercises, be it text-based, multimedia or interactive. The computer can serve the following purposes:

- A centre guide and promotion device, promoting to both learners and staff the counselling service, learning materials, activities/workshops/short courses, etc available in the ILC.
- An on-line learner support, the advantages being:
    - anonymity: learners who are shy, or who lack confidence to meet the counsellors face to face to disclose personal language difficulty, can remain anonymous;
    - convenience: learners can leave messages/questions for counsellors not on duty; the counsellors can pick them up in their office, at home (through modems) or in any place with access to the ILC computer network;
    - efficiency: each learner can see the non-personal questions asked by other learners and the answers provided by the counsellors, thus counsellors need not repeat the same answers again and again;
    - delayed response: both counsellors and learners have more time to think before responding to messages or questions;
    - record and research: everything can be saved and analysed at any time. For example the Cambridge University Language Centre has been recording e-mail feedback from the language learning adviser to students so as to set up a database as a framework for counselling.
- A channel to enhance communication in English for social purposes between counsellors and learners and among learners themselves, both locally and internationally, through e-mail, ILC mailbox, and electronic forums.
- A medium to strengthen writing: to encourage learners to write more and to work collaboratively, with both local and international learners.
- A means to strengthen communication among staff - between the ILC staff and the ELTU staff, which are in separate buildings, and among teacher counsellors themselves.
- A door to international resources, the short-term goals being:
    - to enable the staff to join electronic discussion, such as the TESL-L and the EDUCOM (see note 5), to download TESL files, to organise electronic journals;
    - to enable learners to access the Internet newsgroups, the *CNN Newsroom* (see note 1), *How to get to the White House* on-line (see note 2), and other newsgroups so that they can extend their self-learning practice outside the scope of a single self-access centre in Hong Kong. (Notes on p158.)

Initially the ILC Link is an electronic bulletin board open to CUHK students only. If it is well received and becomes popular, it will be made available for students overseas and will expand to provide the following:

- Self-learning forum
  This is an electronic mail system open to students. In this way a network of learners is created. They can exchange information and views on their learning experience. The students' messages can be monitored by the counsellors on duty.
- Out messages to counsellors
  Students can choose to seek help or send private or public messages, to specific or non-specific language counsellors.
- ELTU mailboxes
  To increase the teacher-student and student-student contact in English outside the classroom and to provide an additional channel for individual consultation.
- 1997 on-line forum
  To encourage students to discuss the 1997 issue, which concerns the future of every undergraduate of English in Hong Kong; open to all CUHK students, staff and guest advisers.

- Conversation exchange
  To match students who are looking for partners for conversation exchange, e.g. exchange students with Cantonese speakers, German/French native speakers with English/Mandarin speakers, etc.
- Writing centre or writing problems
  For students to discuss their writing problems; monitored by counsellors of the writing centre.
- The wall of democracy (Min Zhu Qian)
  In the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and some parts of China, students like to exchange their views on school affairs, current issues, etc by putting up big 'wall posters' in Chinese. Very few students, however, feel it legitimate to write in English. Nor do they have the incentive to. This forum aims to encourage students to discuss school and current affairs in English. It can be monitored by staff of the General Education Department, or the Student Affairs office.
- Help-line for exchange students/expatriate staff
  To encourage local undergraduates/staff to respond to exchange students'/ expatriate staff's questions on the Chinese University and/or Hong Kong. Guest co-ordinator can be invited from the Office of Academic Links.
- Newsgroups
  Newsgroups is another name for the electronic discussion boards available on the Internet. It is accessible through the program NewsWatcher 1.3 in the ILC. Currently there are over a thousand Internet newsgroups. These newsgroups allow students from all over the world to interact in English on any topic they like. For example, under social culture, there are over twenty subgroups, ranging from African America to Vietnam. Under the soc.culture.hk newsgroup, pop-singers, stock market, official language, etc are all recent topics of discussion.
- Others

A task-based, problem solving approach to computer-assisted language learning

We also contemplated which approach could best suit our target learners and independent learning. In a conference in 1989, I summarised from the literature six approaches to CALL and I argued for a task-based, problem solving approach for A-Level students. The tasks that best suit language learning are not those traditional testing or text reconstruction type of exercises which can be done with pen and paper. CALL tasks should be authentic, interactive or move-based, allowing for self-pace and hypothesis testing or problem solving. This approach will work equally well for undergraduate students in our ILC. Another aspect is that, with the advances in technologies, students are not satisfied with plain-text exercises. They expect a multimedia approach with attractive graphics as well as aural/oral components.

Having considered (i) the general principles of independent learning, namely self-paced, catering for a variety of learning styles, providing feedback and peer support; (ii) the characteristics of self-access materials, namely interesting, challenging and varied; and (iii) the special situation of CUHK students, namely the urge to improve oral/ listening skills, the interest in English for social interaction and current affairs, the short school term packed with assignments and quizzes and the demand for audio-visual facilities for group viewing and discussion, we decided to start with a small but varied collection of software which would suit different types of learners. The following are a selection:

- **grammar** - *Choicemaster, Gapmaster, Storyboard* and *Testmaster*
- **vocabulary** - *Carmen Sandiego*, educational free/shareware (such as

Scrabble, Boggle, etc.)
- **listening** - *Sherlock Holmes*
- **speaking** - *Learn to speak English*, free/shareware (such as *Speaking Dictionary*)
- **reading** - *Versatext, Storyboard*
- **writing** - *MacGlobe*, e-mail and e-mail penpals
- **integrated/multi-skills** - *1997 Dilemma, Longman Mini Concordancer*
- **others** - *Complete Shakespeare, Career Opportunities*

Other sources provide software too. For example, the Eurocentre offers an extensive range of grammar topics, exercises and levels. The TESOL CALL-IS library (see note 5 on p158) is also a good source to expand one's text files. We have obtained through file transfer protocols quite a number of free software from the TESOL CALL-IS Library, including twenty exercises each for *Storyboard, Gapmaster* and *Testmaster*. For example, the *Wida Gapmaster* only offers six exercises. CALL-IS library covers a variety of topics: irregular verbs, pronouns, possessive, adverb, articles, negative forms, to or ing, for and since, shop, this-that, to-be, was-were, vocabulary, abbreviation, etc. Though not all of them suit university students in Hong Kong, some of them may be useful for elementary and intermediate language learners from local middle schools and from Mainland China.

However, we decided not to over-emphasise the traditional grammar exercises which focus on word, sentence or even text level. Efforts have also been made to develop in-house materials, which are more motivating, novel, interactive and which allow off-screen oral communication in pairs or in groups. For example:

1. Multimedia software development
   The 1997 Dilemma (see note 3) is the first product in this line. Hong Kong Pathfinders (see note 4) are going underway. The other ambition is to develop a package that trains listening strategies for news report. (Notes on p158.)
2. *Choicemaster*
   The aim is to develop a series of CU Quizzes to increase students' vocabulary in an informal way, which will be useful for communication on campus, and to increase their general knowledge of the Chinese University.

Future directions

We have set up an ILC Language Counsellors' Mailbox to provide personalised learner support and counselling service. We will explore the newsgroups available at the CUHK to evaluate their suitability for self-access language learning for students of our university, and hope to eventually set up our own self-access newsgroup for our students, as well as students in other tertiary institutions. Last but not least, we will continue to tap Internet resources such as *How to get to the White House* on-line and *CNN Newsroom* to find out whether or not and how they can be made available to self-access language learners.

We have no intention to restrict computer applications to the limited, uncommunicative, highly-controlled program-learning type of software in the market, but to adopt an open mind. We have found good reasons to be enthusiastic, to be creative. There are wonderful, numerous possibilities for us to explore! And a thousand projects we can work on!

Notes:

1 *CNN Newsroom* is a fifteen-minute, commercial free, cable-delivered news program offered free of charge to middle and secondary schools in the USA. A classroom guide and on-line language exercises are available. However, at this stage, the program is not available in Hong Kong. With the advances in technology and the CNN's plan to go international, it may be available in a few years' time. Contact Turner Educational Services for information on the program. For details of the Internet distribution of the guide, contact Jeff Hayward <j.hayward@utexas.edu>.

2 *How to get to the White House on-line* allows you to send e-mail to the President and the Vice-President and to receive press releases on economic, social, foreign policy and speeches, news, etc free of charge. You may use the utility as an additional, fast source of information for writing projects, for developing reading skills. You may also use the authentic text of two genres, political speeches and political comments, for a new corpus on politics.

3 *1997 Dilemma* is a decision-making simulation that helps students to contemplate the 1997 issue in depth and share their feelings and opinions, both orally and in the e-forum in the ILC link. Please refer to another paper by the same author, *From ET to Producer*, for details of the production.

4 *1997 Pathfinders* will include more game devices such as jigsaw reading, the slaying of monsters, on-line psychological tests, etc. E-mail george-jor@cuhk.hk for details.

5 Some useful e-mail addresses:

a. General discussion
TESL-L: TESL-L@CUNYVM.BITNET or TESL-L@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

b. CALL and Electronic Communications in EFL/ESL
TESLCA-L: maceytay@klio.umcs.lublin.pl or @plumcs11.bitnet
Bacon@cwis.unomaha.edu
Keith Brithwaite at
ELEVE-MAITRE.IUFM1@UNIV.PERP.FR

c. Freeware/shareware
TESOL CALL-IS Software Library: Deborah at DHealey@OREGON.EDU

d. Classroom test for writing with computers (with worksheets)
Marianne Phinney UT-EL Palso at CQMP@utep.bitnet

e. Australian National database of CALL:
Peter White <peterw@lingua.cltr.ua.oz. Au>

20. *Developing materials for the Independent Learning Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong*

EMMA YUEN-WAI POON

The following is a short description of what learning materials other than CALL are now being collected and adapted for the Hong Kong Chinese University Independent Learning Centre (ILC). (For CALL materials see Linda Mak in this Section.) Also included is a word on what materials are expected to be developed in the future. It should be noted, though, that as the Centre itself has just been opened, student reactions to such materials are not available.

Characteristics of the learner population

At the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) serves an undergraduate population of about 8000, offering English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to first year students, elective skills and integrated courses to all others. Last year, the Unit operated over 70 classes, but this only admitted approximately 15% of the student population. Judging from the overwhelming response to such courses, it seems that students still find it useful to take English courses at University, in spite of their very full timetable.

This is very interesting in view of their experiences with learning the language:

1 Most students in Hong Kong generally have studied English for more than twelve years before they enter university. At the end of secondary school, there are usually more than six hours of English instruction per week.

2 Most students at the University use English as their medium of study. Their textbooks and examinations are in English, so are most of the papers and reports that they write.

3 Although English is very seldom used at home, it is one of the official languages in Hong Kong, and used everywhere: two English newspapers and numerous magazines are published in English, not to mention the countless others published elsewhere but sold in Hong Kong; there are local and satellite radio and television channels that broadcast in English; films and videos are readily available, normally within months of their release in USA or Britain. Street signs and all government notices and documents are bilingual; tourists arrive every day from all over the world, most of whom use English in communicating with the locals.

Still, a survey done by the ELTU (Fu et al, 1993) revealed that most students were not confident of their proficiency in English. They saw their standards as even declining during their four years at the University. This echoes the results found in an earlier survey (Law and Mak, 1992), where one-third of the respondents perceived themselves as weak in English!

English is also a very important language in the workplace. Almost all job application letters are expected to be written in English, and interviews are also conducted in English. In fact, 67% of the respondents from the Law and Mak (1992) survey indicated that they would like to work on Business English at the ILC.

Materials for the ILC: three requirements

Given the needs of the learners and the particular situation at CUHK and in Hong Kong in general, developing materials to motivate students to stay and work at the ILC poses a big challenge indeed.

1 Materials must be interesting and challenging:
Although this is a principle that applies to materials development in all self-access centres, it is particularly important for us. This means, to my mind, that as far as possible, materials should not duplicate what the students have already been doing for so many years past.

2 Materials must be relevant:
Work at the ILC is ideally a voluntary activity, as opposed to joining a class. One may argue that most people join classes voluntarily, but usually they will be expected to follow some kind of study or work schedule, monitored by the teacher. Unless the students see the materials as relevant to their present or future needs, or are shown such relevance, e.g. through learner training exercises, it will be difficult to persuade them to come again.

3 Materials must be varied:
Studies on learning styles suggest that different learners are suited, and indeed prefer, different styles of learning. Materials collected and/or produced must cater to such different preferences, rather than offering 'the best way to learn'.

Materials in the ILC come from three sources:

Commercially published materials

We are now collecting materials at suitable levels from as many sources as possible. It is hoped that this bank of materials will enlighten students about the richness and variety of language used for different purposes by different people under different circumstances.

There are, of course, ELT materials. They are convenient and well-tested but most of the activities are already familiar to our students. Most of these materials are not designed for self-access, although in most cases teachers' guides or students' guides are available. The following adaptations may be made before these materials are placed in the ILC:

- Books are divided into sections, each put in separate folders for easy access.
- Guides to explain the aims and functions of each activity are produced. Advice on how to use the materials may also be included.
- Additional explanation may be written to supplement the published teachers/students' guides.
- Cross-references and follow-up activities are suggested.

It is obvious that it is not feasible, and in fact rather counter-productive to work on each book in the collection. The Centre should really be aiming at helping learners develop strategies, rather than teaching them discrete items. So, only a representative, or 'core' collection of materials will be adapted, demonstrating to the learners the range of materials available, how they might be used, and perhaps even showing strategies in action.

Our students indicated that they were interested in materials presented in the visual medium (Law and Mak, 1992). The authentic materials acquired, like films, documentaries, as well as magazines, short stories and novels, should be well used, especially by the more advanced learners. Again, it is not feasible to provide work units for each of these items. Rather, generic worksheets are written to orientate learners. (See Appendices, pp162-3, for examples.) Viewing/reading guides with language help, like glossaries, are planned for a core group of films and stories. All these efforts aim to demonstrate to learners how they might use authentic sources.

Class handouts

Materials prepared by teachers of the ELTU for use in their classes is a very important source of materials. They are usually specific to our students' needs and interests. Most of these materials are not written for self-access, but adaptations can be done rather easily.

Commissioned materials

With the prolific amount of materials published commercially, it is difficult to see why more of the same should be written ourselves. However, there are various things that still need to be commissioned:

- Articles introducing learning strategies are a part of the training given to learners, orientating them to the Centre.
- Materials will be created to support the learner training programme (see Beatrice Ma in this Section). This will involve, for example, activities to heighten the students' awareness of how they learn and use language. Perhaps materials comparing English to the students' mother tongue (Cantonese Chinese) will also be useful.
- Learning materials can also be based on readings from Linguistics (including Psycho-linguistics and Socio-linguistics), Communication and even Literature.
- Materials based on authentic sources like television broadcasts and movies, magazines and newspapers (even public notices and street signs) are not readily available commercially, and need to be prepared in-house. There is also the possibility of the production of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) materials based on our students' real study materials.

PRESENTING THE MATERIALS

All printed materials and tapes in the Centre are displayed on shelves and openly accessible to learners. Videos and laser discs are kept at the counter, but the attractive and colourful covers are also put on display. The idea, in short, is to encourage learners to browse through the collection and pick up things of interest.

A good deal of attention has been given to the presentation of the worksheets to give them a glossy finish. This is possible through the use of desktop publishing computer software. Cover pages are done in different colours to identify each skill area. Folders in different colours representing different levels of difficulty are used to hold the work units, allowing easy recognition.

The road ahead

Ideally, we would like to create an environment where students come in and work on improving their English voluntarily and regularly. They would find challenges rather than pressure. They would find built-in incentives for their perseverance, rather than rely on examination grades or teacher's praise.

Realistically, however, most students who pass through our doors at the initial stage are those who have been asked by their class teachers to spend time at the ILC as part of the course requirements. To meet the demand, published materials on skills development and class handouts will form the main bulk of of the materials bank at the ILC.

Will these students continue to work at the ILC? How can we 'persuade' them to do so? How 'independent' can our students be? do they want to be?

To find answers to these and many other questions, we are planning research projects to study the students' work performance, habits and preferences right from the start. Hopefully this will help us shape the Centre to better meet the needs of our students.

Appendix 1

Independent Learning Centre Movie report

Name:
Major:

Title of film:
Directed by:
Producer:
Year:
Principal actors and actresses:
Type of film:
Interest value:
(1 star terrible to 5 stars excellent)
Language difficulty rating:
(1 very easy to 5 very difficult)
Reason(s) for this language rating:

Summary of the plot
(i.e. the bare essentials in one sentence only)

Time and setting:
Main themes and ideas; director's intentions
(a list)

Reason(s) for the film's title:
Other comments
(e.g. use of the music, special effects, quality of acting)

(Note: worksheet designed by Richard Lewthwaite)

Appendix 2

Short stories - Questions for thinking

The following questions are general in nature and are intended to stimulate your thinking as you read any short story. Perhaps not all questions are equally relevant to your particular story but many of them will be. You may wish to recommend the same story to a classmate or friend and then you could discuss together some of your reactions to these questions and some of your feelings about the story. Our hope is that you will find pleasure and enjoyment in your reading. Happy reading!

1. What is your general reaction to the story? Did you find it interesting, boring, difficult to understand, too childish?
2. Which of the characters in the story did you find most interesting? Describe this character.
3. Which of the characters did you like best? Would you like a chance to meet this character 'in person'?
4. Why did the author choose this particular title for the story? Does the title have any special meaning?
5. What do you think the story is really about?
6. Do you think the author had a particular purpose or reason for writing the story?
7. From whose point of view is the story told? In other words, who is the 'narrator'?
8. How does the story end? Are you glad it ended this way or would you prefer that it had ended differently?
9. What do you suppose could have happened next if the story were to be continued?
10. Did you find the language of the story clear, descriptive, difficult?

(Note: worksheet designed by Gail S Fu)

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Conclusion

This is, by definition, an open book, and this makes it difficult to write a conclusion. Rather, we have chosen to ask an adult learner to let us have his views after reading the book. This is one reaction. What is yours?

Self-access and the adult language learner

As a manager in industry, I find the learning process very difficult. Frankly, it would suit me to delegate the job to another member of staff, or even back to the teacher! But this is not possible to do with the foreign language knowledge which I need for meeting with colleagues, telephone calls and correspondence. I also find the traditional teacher/pupil relationship very hard to accept, perhaps due to a lack of humility; also hard to accept is the fact that I will never be as good at languages as a native speaker.

This book on self-access learning is most welcome with its emphasis on listening to the needs of the learner. The teacher as a counsellor and adviser to your own autonomous learning, who knows you well enough to give relevant and appropriate support, clearly makes sense. Similarly, the checklists used to establish motivation, degree of need, level of existing knowledge and learning style are certain to be valuable to the student and teacher. The different access points recognise people's different approach to reading.

A lot of this book is about technology and its uses. Very interesting were the chapters on e-mail. More and more people have screens at home and at work and the provision of advice by this means is efficient use of time, as well as overcoming the inevitable feelings of isolation by the responsive and sympathetic service. The concept of 'centre' becomes just that - the core of the organisation. This gives real meaning to autonomy of learning by self-access via the technology now available.

The chapters on management and resources and the useful real-life examples will give valuable advice to those setting up or running a self-access language centre.

Of course this diversity in the needs and abilities of students of languages and the reason for paying attention to their needs as well has always existed, hence the requirement for teachers. Various examples in this book illustrate that 'contact time' can be varied both in nature and quantity when you get away from the classroom model with or without homework and project work. Students' needs for structure, even discipline, as well as feedback and encouragement are well covered. I would like more on standards and accreditation in this connection.

The motivation, time necessary and methodology to learn are indeed hard to achieve: this book takes us a long way forward in explaining how self-access will assist in the process.

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At a time when the demand and perceived need for language learning has never been greater, self-access centres provide a means to ease the problems of access to language education and of providing foreign language programmes to ever-increasing numbers of learners. This book discusses a range of theoretical and practical issues related to the setting up of self-access centres.

The six sections contain contributions grouped around broad themes and covering a variety of aspects of self-access language learning:

- learners' perceptions of language learning
- the role of technology
- preparing and interacting with learners
- defining the 'clients' of your self-access centre and their needs
- potential uses of electronic communication
- practical matters of databases, files, cataloguing

The book reflects the international experience of its contributors and has been written for educators setting up or already running self-access centres, whether in higher or further education or in industry.

Dr Edith Esch is Director of the Language Centre of Cambridge University. Before then she was a member of the team at the Centre de Recherche et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) and held the post of Assistant Director of Research in Applied Lingustics at the University of Cambridge. Her research work has been in the area of foreigner-talk and native/non-native interaction, and she has published with Philip Riley the book The bilingual family *(CUP, 1986).*

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